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Moments and Patterns that Matter: Identifying Literate Opportunities and Developmental Trajectories in a Middle School Classroom

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Moments and Patterns that Matter:

Identifying Literate Opportunities and Developmental Trajectories in a Middle School  
Classroom

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in Education

by

Ryan J. Dippre

Committee in charge:

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June 2015

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Charles Bazerman, Chair

March 2015

Moments and Patterns that Matter:  
Identifying Literate Opportunities and Developmental Trajectories in a Middle School  
Classroom

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by

Ryan Dippre

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I would also like to thank my family for their continued support throughout my graduate school experience. Even before I loaded up my little Hyundai Accent with everything it could fit and struck out west to Santa Barbara, my friends and family were convinced I could succeed. They called, they visited, and they always helped me keep the trials and tribulations of graduate school in perspective. This dissertation is as much theirs as it is mine, even though I am still going to make them call me “Doctor” around the holidays just to be the annoying relative.

To my good friends Josh Hurlbutt, Jason Nickle, Jeff Thompson, and Jessie Graff, I thank you for all of your support through this. Your text messages, phone calls, visits, and demands that I visit kept me sane throughout this process. I’m very lucky to have you all in my life.

I owe deep gratitude toward the teachers and coaches I worked with during my time at Delaware Valley High School. It was at Delaware Valley that I learned how to be a teacher, and I thank you all for the guidance you gave me. I owe a particular debt to the English department and the football coaching staff, and a greater debt to Keith Olsommer, a head coach I ended up bothering for over a decade as both a player and a coach.

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## ABSTRACT

### Moments and Patterns that Matter: Identifying Literate Opportunities and Developmental Trajectories in a Middle School Classroom

by

Ryan Dippre

Literate activity, like all human activity, is situated in localities: points of time and space wherein individuals engage in literate acts in order to accomplish goals. But these points of time and space are situated in a history of individuals, collectives, tools, and environment, and each element in that point of time and space bring with it layered histories, meanings, and intentions. What is not yet clear from research on literacy, writing development, and classroom activity is how these points of time and space are utilized as resources for writers in new situations, and how the structure of schooling and its changes over time shape those resources. This project explores how the activity of student writing grows and changes at different points of space and time throughout the school year for ten seventh-grade students in two language arts classes in southern California, and, furthermore, how those points of space and time lead to changes in the patterns of writing activity that those students engage in.

Through a theoretical framework that examines writing activity as the individuated, intersubjective (Bazerman, 2013) establishment of structured (Giddens, 1984) situations

(Mehan & Wood, 1975a) that reinforce and perpetuate systems of activity (Engestrom, 2001) in a flat, uneven social world (Latour, 2003), this work examines literacy development as a series of literate acts of increasing complexity and specificity suspended in time and space and connected materially in a variety of ways. These literate acts serve as resources for future writing activity that can be accessed via these material connections as well as the networks of connections established in the minds of users of literacy.

By focusing on ten students in those two classrooms and tracking their writing habits throughout the course of the school year, this study shows the changes in writing that happened to these students over time. These observations of the students, which was supported by video analysis, document collection, and interviews with both students and their teacher, are analyzed through a grounded theory analysis (Saldana, 2009) through eleven different exposures (Prior, 1998) in order to bound student action within literate acts.

When examining writing for multiple purposes in the classroom—such as benchmarks, warm-ups, etc.—specific literate acts were, when analyzed in a multi-exposure manner, shown to have pathways of connections leading outward from them both forward and backward in time. These acts were then analyzed and connected through intertextual connections, genre sets and systems, activity systems, and community values to other kinds of writing that students complete throughout the school year.

This analysis shows that students engage in enduring, situated orchestration shifts (ESOS) in their use of talk, tools, and texts around and for the act of writing, and that these shifts serve as the groundwork upon which writing development builds. Implications for teacher education, the teaching of writing, and the act of writing are proposed based on these findings.

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## Chapter One: Writing Activity, Development, and History

*The midnight gang's assembled and picked a rendezvous for the night /  
They'll meet 'neath that giant Exxon sign that brings this fair city light /  
Man there's an opera out on the Turnpike /  
There's a ballet being fought out in the alley /  
Until the local cops, Cherry Tops, rips this holy night /*

-Bruce Springsteen, "Jungleland"

The above lyrics by Springsteen highlight a huge clash of ideas far beyond the struggles of rebellious, striving youth against the conforming powers of establishment. In five lines, Springsteen discusses assemblies, rendezvous, operas, ballets, and holy nights and yet, in the same breath, Exxon signs, turnpikes, alleys, and the local fuzz. In these lines, the triumphs of civilization and the flatlining ordinariness of life come together and show the transformations that the youth of Jersey go through to re-imagine the sometimes-sordid world within which they live.

These lines are a perfect fit not only for the rest of "Jungleland" but Springsteen's *Born to Run* album as a whole: the LP plays host to a range of figures struggling to change the world they live in, sometimes by leaving for another location and sometimes by attempting to alter their situation. But what is perhaps most powerful about Springsteen's lyrics here is not the connection between this selection and the remaining album but instead the everyday connections these lyrics suggest. There is a natural connection among meetings beneath Exxon signs, turnpikes, and ballets: they all are parts of society and are sites of interactions among people. That is, they are all sites of situations constructed by and for people so that they can make certain that they understand what is going on around them. The difference between the turnpike and the opera is the events that go on within those situations, not the fact that both are socially constructed situations.

If we think of human beings as always operating within socially constructed situations, then drawing connections between operas and meetings beneath Exxon signs is easy: in both, people bring with them a set of expectations as to what will happen (and what they want to happen) and proceed from that basis. More distantiated situations, such as those involving writing, also carry with them their own expectations for what could, should, will, or might happen.

The situated nature of human experience and activity is a key concept in this dissertation: it serves a critical role in the theoretical framework and the methodological choices that follow, as well as shaping the perspective on the upcoming review of literature. By understanding human nature as situational, we can better understand how people move from one vastly different scene to another, how the ballets and the turnpikes meet up, and how guitars can flash like switchblades. We can also understand how one scene influences another, and how objects, such as texts, can move from one location to another and both influence and be influenced by such changes.

But situativity is not the driving purpose of this dissertation: instead, it is a conceptual underpinning that will later be expanded upon, and without which this dissertation's research questions would be difficult to explore. The focus of this dissertation, rather, is on the writing activity changes seen in a yearlong study conducted in two middle school classrooms in southern California. The concept of situativity helps me understand and explain the growth and change I saw in students during that study, and it has proven central to the subsequent shaping of my research methods and questions.

Springsteen's lyrics above certainly point out the interconnected situativity of human interaction, but what is less clear in those lyrics (and the Boss should hardly be blamed for

leaving out complex theoretical explanations) is the historical nature of situations, which is another cornerstone of this dissertation. If people are always operating within socially constructed situations, then both the situations that they construct and the people in the situations that do the constructing are connected to other situations in both the past and the future. People bring with them the knowledge and experiences of past situations into current situations and make sense of what they are currently experiencing through the lens of those past experiences. Situations, and our understanding of situations, do not come from nowhere but are steeped in (1) the rich history of culture and society and (2) the history of individuated interactions within that rich history. Situations are constructed by people interacting with one another with the knowledge of their past situations and, often, their intentions for future situations. My research in two middle school classrooms began with the understanding that human activity is both situationally and historically located. These two cornerstones of my theoretical framework and methodological selection have influenced the way I collected my data, the decisions that I made during my analysis, and the conclusions that I have drawn.

The research for this dissertation began with questions about what counts as writing within any given K-12 classroom. Obviously, students put pens and pencils to paper (and fingers to keyboards) on a regular basis throughout the school year. They write notes to friends, take notes in class, and complete given assignments. But not all of these constitute “writing” in the classroom community that is talked into being between students and the teacher. When a middle school or high school teacher discusses a specific student’s “writing,” only some of those kinds of inscription are actually being discussed. I was interested in knowing what kinds of writing “counted,” how other kinds of writing were accounted for,

and how they all fit together through the eyes of the student and shaped the literate development of that student.

In order to explore these concerns, I began observations during the 2013-2014 school year with a middle school Language Arts teacher at Goodland<sup>1</sup> Middle School, a public, 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade school in Southern California. I had met the teacher, Emily, during a summer institute at the local branch of the National Writing Project (NWP). Emily and I discussed writing a great deal during the summer institute, and when I began casting about for a place to study what counts as writing in a given class, Emily's classroom seemed to be a natural choice. As a teacher concerned with writing and willing to experiment with the writing that she did, Emily's definitions of what "counts" as writing would be easier to detect and define than some other, less explicitly writing-focused teachers. I also thought that the subject of the class (Language Arts), which traditionally shoulders the burden of teaching writing, would prove valuable.

During my observations of Emily's classroom, I saw that what "counted" as writing, as it was understood by both students and teacher, was a transient phenomenon: certain things counted in certain situations as "writing," while other kinds of inscription counted for different things and in different ways. What turned out to be important to me, in the end, was not what counted as writing so much as how student and teacher categorizations and prioritizations of different kinds of inscription influenced students' understandings of writing—as well as their writing activity—and how I could see the changes based on those influences as the school year progressed.

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<sup>1</sup> The name "Goodland Middle School," along with the names of the participants in this study, have been changed to protect the identities of those involved.



As the data continued to roll in throughout the school year, I started taking a closer look at the development of students in their understandings of writing (including what counts as writing), the activity of their writing, the processes they went through to complete it, and the intentions that they had when going about it. What, in short, were the situations within which writing took place, how were those situations historically informed, what proved to be repetitive in those situations, and what about these situations changed over time? These kinds of questions forced me to look closely at what was happening in the classroom not just at the level of classroom activity but at the level of individual action within these collaborative activities. Since every student is likely to take up a given activity in some kind of a different way, what is the impact of these changes? How do they add up over time, in order to create a developmental trajectory of learning to write?

I examined two of Emily's classes throughout the school year. Both were seventh-grade classrooms. Emily's 4<sup>th</sup> period class was designated "honors," and was designed to fit the community's demands for a GATE (Gifted and Talented Education) program. Emily's 5<sup>th</sup> period class was designated "College Prep" and was designed for the majority of the school's students. Each class began the year with nearly thirty-six students in it, although this number would drop after the first month or so of school, particularly as the administration attempted to lower the student-to-teacher ratio in the college prep Language Arts classes. The drop in students aside, however, examining close to seventy students at the high level of detail I was aiming for would have been impossible. To make data collection more manageable, I selected a total of ten students from the two classes to examine closely on a daily basis.

These students were selected in pairs after some discussion with Emily. Each pair (one male, one female) was selected for a level of writing ability as well as a level of

personal connection with writing. These ten students were put into five categories: advanced, self-identified writers who write outside of school; advanced writers who did not self-identify as writers but who engaged in writing outside of class; advanced writers who engaged in irregular writing outside of class; advanced writers who did not write outside of class; and proficient writers who did not write outside of class. The “advanced” and “proficient” references are to their scores on writing assignments at the start of the school year, rather than on their standardized assessments, which were several months old at that point and may not have had any bearing on the success that students would have in their new middle school writing situation.

This mix gave me a wide range of academic prowess, academic engagement, and affective connection with writing in my analysis without slipping into outlier populations: none of the students were head-and-shoulders above their peers in terms of writing ability, and none had any developmental disabilities that substantially set back their writing performance. This selection provided me with frequent, consistent moments of writing throughout the school year that were not subject to additional teacher or aide supervision, chunked assignments, or otherwise altered activity setups that modified the learning environment and assignments for students labeled as “struggling” writers while also avoiding the issues of deeply internalized writing practices that prodigy student writers would have.

These ten students were studied, along with the class, for a full school year. During that time, these students had their work collected and copied, their actions observed and sometimes recorded, and the changes in their writing activity tracked. As the year progressed and, in particular, at years’ end, I looked through their accumulated data with the research

questions below in mind. The focus of my research was on the writing activity of students, and in particular the development of that writing activity.

### **Research Questions**

- 1) How does the writing activity of students develop throughout the course of the school year?
- 2) What is the connection between writing activity development and the complex social networks that exist within and without the classroom?
- 3) What is the role of student-teacher interaction in the development of writing activity in students?
- 4) What are the social and historical connections influencing this writing activity development?

The first of these questions serves as my driving question, and the following three will allow me, in later chapters, to expand on specific aspects of the first question in greater detail. The primary question concerns itself with the issue of how “writing activity” develops. The concept of “writing activity development” is a complex one, and warrants some further description.

I use the words “writing activity” and “development” here in very specific ways. When I speak of “writing activity,” I am referring to the actions that an individual completes while writing. This is more than just putting pen to paper, or fingers to keyboard, as we will soon see: writing activity is a complex social, cognitive, historical, and individuated act. However, for the purposes of this study, I am concerned primarily with the immediate activity of a person engaged in the act of writing: how does someone go about drawing on the talk, tools, and texts surrounding them to accomplish a goal in writing? The historical

antecedents, as well as the larger systemic connections, are all certainly of interest, but that interest only further informs understandings of given moments of writing activity.

My decision to use the term “writing activity” instead of “literate activity” is a conscious one, made because the work that I focus on for this study is the production of the written word. While literate activity can embrace a larger set of issues, looking at *writing* activity development focuses this research on how students generate written words for specific purposes. Writing activity is certainly *also* literate activity, but my concern will remain with the issues of how writing is taken up during that literate activity.

To summarize, the term “writing activity” refers to the actions that people undertake while attempting to accomplish goals through the creation of alphanumeric text. This can happen through any of multiple modalities, and often, as will be seen, through the integration of multiple modes orchestrated together. The primary question of this dissertation is focused on how this writing activity develops throughout the course of a school year.

My use of the term “development” is also specific and needs some teasing out, due to the many different ways in which “development” is used when referencing writing. Cognitive work in writing activity, such as Flower and Hayes (1980), Kellogg (2010), Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987), and Berninger and Swanson (1994), among others, have focused on the development of writing as an internal activity, consisting of stages such as generation and transcription, or different actions in writing, such as knowledge-telling and knowledge-transforming. While these findings have been useful in detailing the many ways in which writing changes over time, since this dissertation is built on situationality and the history of that situationality, I am interested in the complex contextual realities within which writing activity changes. Toward that end, then, this work looks toward the changes in

writing activity that occur with students in their uses of talk, tools, and text from one situation to the next.

Of course, writing changes a great deal from one moment to the next: people are always adjusting their writing activity to accommodate new circumstances. A person writing throughout the day turns on a light when the sun sets, in order to keep writing. Someone with a sore back will sit differently to relieve the pressure in a writing session. These changes are small, and often unnoticed. More habituated practices of organizing one's environment to have a more effective writing experience has been described by Prior and Shipka (2003) as environment selecting and structuring practices (ESSPs). The focus of development for this study is not how fleeting changes ebb and flow over time, nor how ESSPs become set for adolescent writers, but rather how students come to engage in writing activity differently over time, how those changes sustain themselves in patterned ways, and how they serve as a groundwork for understanding and going about the act of writing differently, both consciously and habitually.

Writing activity development, by definition, would have to be a sustained modification of the assemblage of conscious and habitual activities that assist a writer in carrying out a task of writing. As writers come to know and think about writing differently, they engage in the act of writing differently; and as they come to engage in the act of writing differently, they begin to think about writing differently. This back-and-forth activity from habit to conscious action—historically located and situationally based as it is—is the basis for writing activity development, and something that the close examination of moments of writing activity will be able to reveal.

Of course, not every shift in the activity of a writer is useful—some tactical reorganizations of writing activity are merely temporary, the result of highly unusual situations or an unexpected shortage of writing tools. Some shifts, however, endure in different ways and for different purposes. Furthermore, since the act of writing is invested in so many different aspects of human experience (Bazerman, 2001), there are a variety of routes for any shift in the activity of writing activity to persist over time. A changed conceptual understanding about writing, for example, may make itself known materially through, say, multiple, multimodal drafts of future texts, even if the concept itself remained largely unelaborated in talk after the concept is internalized. In order to understand writing activity development, it is necessary to trace out not just the changes in writing activity, but how those changes in writing activity shape one another, as well as what they add up to in future writing activity.

Writing activity development, then, can be defined as sustained changes in the tactical assemblage of talk, tools, and texts around the act of writing in a given situation. Of course, the “given situation” itself still needs to be defined in greater detail—something addressed in chapter two—but the general understanding of what counts as development, how, and for what purposes will clarify the value of the texts reviewed in the remainder of the chapter.

Considering writing activity development instead of simply “writing development” as a key focus represents a large and important shift in how student development in writing is understood. Writing activity development locates student writing development in specific times and places, provides connections among the daily improvisations around writing and the trajectories of changes in individual writing over time. Furthermore, it shows changes in writing over time not as individual but as individuated—as fragmented perceptions and

understandings of local interactions involving writing that are carried by individuals to other constructions of writing in other local interactions. Examining writing activity development allows researchers to see how small acts of using talk, tools, and texts around writing can influence individual perceptions and understandings about writing over time.

Despite my focus on writing activity development and my understanding of human activity as situated and historical, past studies on writing development have still proven to be substantially useful for understanding the writing activity of individuals, even if their theoretical and empirical foundations remain slightly different. While their theoretical orientations may vary, these prior studies have focused on process as well as product in the development of writers, which Alamargot and Fayol (2009) argue are of equal importance in their review of writing development, “A developmental model of written production should predict both the course of the writing processes (i.e., the processing strategies) and the characteristics of the end product (i.e., the textual quality and quantity), in light of the writer’s general development, his or her specific writing expertise and the learning context” (p. 23). In order to draw from the findings of research below while also accounting for the contextual elements that my interests require and moving toward a model of writing production that embraces Alamargot and Fayol’s claims, I consider writing development through the lens of Bazerman, Brandt, Berninger, Applebee, Rowe, Graham, Scheppegriell, and Matsuda, who are currently producing work on the development of writing across the lifespan. They define writing development as “an ongoing struggle to control and integrate meanings that are socially relevant and individually generated through the technologies of writing and its practices in the context of one’s lifeworld.” (p. 1). Their claim that “change occurs as part of growing up and growing older biologically, cognitively, linguistically, and

socially” (p. 2) begins to work toward the incorporation of social action that the concept of situativity embraces while, at the same time, accounting for the many findings of Bereiter, Scardamalia, Berninger, Swanson, and many others in the changing of final written products and cognitive activity.

The research questions that I have proposed above direct my research into the records that I have obtained through the definition of writing activity development (as understood through the lenses of situativity and history) provided above. My primary research question—How does the writing activity of students develop throughout the course of the school year?—drove me to look closely at the acts of writing that students performed throughout the course of the school year, as well as the results of their acts of writing (i.e., essays, poems, stories). But, sticking with my consideration of situativity and history above, I had to look beyond the specific acts that occurred within Emily’s classroom walls. What were the antecedents of the acts that I was seeing? What were the social and historical connections? I created further research questions for the express purpose of expanding my view beyond the immediate activity of student and teacher actions so that I could locate them within historically developing activity.

Toward that end, my second question—What is the connection between writing activity development and the complex social networks that exist within and without the classroom?—allows me to explore more deeply the historical, social, and economic forces at work in the writing activity of students. It pushes me beyond the classroom by allowing me to examine the complex trail that various elements of the classroom (i.e., standards, texts, lesson plans) have followed to enter Emily’s curriculum, as well as the interactions among



those elements as the year progresses. The ways in which these elements are taken up in interactions among students during classroom activity are also considered.

The third research question—What is the role of student-teacher interaction in the development of writing activity in students?—allows me to look more closely at the specific interactions between Emily and her students. These interactions are couched within and—in some ways—constituted by the larger structure of the class, but as each student takes up different interactive opportunities with Emily, he or she creates different and important developmental opportunities for understanding writing and what should happen during writing. This research question allowed me to track the interactions among students and teachers even if there was no writing going on so that I could see patterns of interactions and use that as a lens through which to examine the interactions (and individual activities) that students performed while engaged in writing activities.

The fourth research question—What are the social and historical connections influencing this writing activity development?—allows me to more carefully explore the larger social and historical influences on the writing activity development that the students undergo. This question is more distant from the classroom than the second research question, which traces influences within the classroom outward through material links. With this research question, I am able to look at large-scale historical work on writing in the classroom, such as that by Langer, Applebee, Hillocks, Graham, and many others who have examined trends in writing instruction of students over time on a large scale, so that the general trends in writing instruction in the United States over time can be examined and connected to what is happening in Emily's classroom throughout the year with and around writing. The fourth research question puts Emily's actions and her students' development in a broader, national,

historical context, which can both inform the learning of the students and inform our understandings of the historical development of writing instruction in U.S. public education.

These four research questions, as I mention above, serve as lenses through which I have examined the records that I have collected. My first question focuses on the individual writing activity in the classroom. My second question examines how that individual writing activity fits within larger networks of interactions throughout the school year. My third research question examines closely the student-teacher dynamic present in the classroom and uses it as a lens to explore further each student's structuring of writing activity. My fourth research question expands beyond the immediate classroom and into historical understandings of how teachers in the United States have gone about writing instruction over time.

Each of these questions moves slowly outward from the first: from activity, to social connections, to interpersonal connections, to historical connections. This ever-expanding web of examination, while occasionally cumbersome, provides a rich, intricately detailed picture of the writing activities of students in Emily's classroom, and my initial principles of situativity and historicity are largely responsible for their construction in this manner. Before moving on, however, a negotiation among my figurative references to "space" and "time" need some clarification.

The vast majority of my concern in this work is geared toward issues of time: historical, social, cultural, organizational, and individual. Time is treated by different scholars in different ways, and I will expand more in chapter four how my own approach to time influences my understanding of the data that I am examining. At the current moment, however, it is important to know that the focus of this work is indeed on time, and that the

power of social forces—such as “large” or “small,” “distant” and “local”—are all actually temporally, and not spatially, located. Human institutions, such as federal governments, colleges and universities, and Wall Street, are not powerful because of their size but because of their historical influence: the times during which they have existed and continued to exist influences their power.

Despite my privileging of time over space, however, spatial metaphors often become drawn into the mix, as when I discussed the “web of examination” above. This spatial metaphor is important only regarding situativity: in certain situations, we can speak in spatial terms because our lens of examination moves beyond an individual performing an activity to other talk, tools, and texts caught within that situation. Spatial expansion captures more of a given situation, identifies more of the historical trends, than spatial narrowing. In this way, then, spatial metaphors become a tool for looking at the interactions of temporally-located institutions and forces: when we widen our gaze in a given situation, we are able to better see how time-sensitive forces influence and are influenced by the activity of people within those situations.

As I established earlier—and with the help of Springsteen—people construct situations with others and the tools around them in order to understand their worlds, their roles in that world, and their goals. To do this, however—for people to be able to move from one situation to another—there must be some connection among different sites of situations that people can draw from to build those situations. Simply put, one cannot construct a situation of meaning from nothing. This interconnectedness of situations can be explained through Latour’s (2005) concept of the *flatness* of the social world.

In his introduction to *Reassembling the Social* (2005), Latour announces his intention to break down a common tendency in the social sciences: “when social scientists add the adjective ‘social’ to some phenomenon, they designate a stabilized state of affairs, a bundle of ties that, later, may be mobilized to account for some other phenomenon” (p. 1). Latour has two issues with this designation: first, this tendency does not allow researchers to explore the nature of how something is assembled; second, this leads the term “social” to connote two things: a series of connections, and “a specific type of ingredient that is supposed to differ from other materials” (p. 2). These two problems lead Latour to “redefine the notion of the social” (p. 2) in order to make it possible to (1) trace connections and associations across materials and (2) avoid treating “social” as a separate ingredient.

Latour defines “the social not as a special domain, a specific realm, or a particular sort of thing, but only as a very peculiar movement of re-association and reassembling” (p. 6). He follows this movement of re-association and reassembling through the methods gleaned from Actor Network Theory (ANT). Through the application of this theory, Latour tries “to render the social world as *flat* as possible in order to ensure that the establishment of any new link is clearly visible” (p. 16). He reminds the reader that “every social scientist knows quite well that local interactions are not a good place to rest. When, for one reason or another, you happen to come on to the stage, you become quickly aware that most of the ingredients composing the scene have not been brought there by you and that many have been improvised on the spot by the other participants” (p. 165). In order to avoid either being trapped in local sites of study or building out into large social forces that are both everywhere and nowhere, Latour provides three moves for creating a “flat” series of interconnected local

sites established and connected by a series of mediators: localizing the global, redistributing the local, and connecting sites.

For Latour, the world is not made up of large social forces, or any kind of “social” material at all, but rather a complex collection of local groups of mediators who, through the use of tools (including language), are able to connect to other mediators at other sites. Our social world is a string of connections, some of which reach very far and wide and are similar to other connections. In other words, tools, talk, and text created in one location (for our purposes: one situation) can move along strings of connections to other people in other situations. An executive order written by a U.S. President, for example (i.e., one person writing in one situation) will move from one locality to another—that is, from the White House to, say, the Department of Homeland Security, or other agencies—via email, postal mail, and media outlets, and influence how people go about their daily business. By calling the social world flat, Latour highlights that those in more powerful localities (i.e., Washington, D.C.) simply have more connections to other localities, and it is these collections of connections that allow them to promote the work they construct at that locality.

The flatness of the social world allows Latour to see the world as a web of groupings made up of and connected by mediators, which can go a long way toward explaining social phenomena in a way that empowers the terms, concepts, and understandings of local actors instead of social scientific terminology. However, what Latour is not able to reach in his analysis of both the social world and sociology is the historical trends within which these mediated groupings exist. Latour argues that certain, apparently “macro” forces, have more connections than other localities, but the historical nature of these connections is left unconsidered. This is not to say that Latour is not concerned with historical process, but

rather than his argument—focused as it was on the limits of traditional definitions of the “social” and an outline of ANT—does not consider it in greater depth. *Why* do some local sites—such as a Wall Street trading floor, as Latour himself discusses—have more connections than others? What are the consequences of these connections, and how do they change over time?

These unanswered questions lead to a qualified agreement with Latour’s position: yes, the social world is flat and made up of strings of mediated and remediated localities, but these localities are themselves uneven, endowed with greater connections because of the historical trends of certain localities. Certain localities have a greater number of connections to other sites, have more materials available to send along those connections, have created deep grooves along those pathways that give them an added heft in the assembly of society across various localities. If the localizing work of Latour can make clear connections between mediators of different groups in different locations, then the work of Giddens (1984) can make clear the historical trends that lead mediators in certain localities to see certain opportunities for action while ignoring others.

Latour’s work simplifies the social world for research purposes, although that simplification defies the complicated, messy nature of reality that humans encounter. Giddens (1984) attempts to capture the messy reality that humans encounter and how they encounter it. For Giddens, the space-time boundaries that people encounter, the co-presence of other actors, and historically situated identities create routines that people engage with on three levels of consciousness: the unconscious, the practical consciousness, and the discursive consciousness. Through a mix of these three levels of consciousness, individuals experience day-to-day life, their life spans, and the durable life of the institutions of society

(though they only engage with a part of that). They encounter daily life, lifespans, and institutional lifespans all at the same time, and with all three levels of consciousness operating. The routines that people create help them understand the world and, to a certain extent, shape that world. The routines of people get shaped by objects that arrive at localities from other, much more distant localities.

Bringing Latour together with Giddens completes two important tasks: first, Latour's flattening of the social world turns our world into a series of interconnected localities. Second, Giddens' position highlights the historical, enduring nature of institutions and the power of routine in maintaining certain connections over time, which create historically smoothed pathways for those connections so that they endure and, to an extent, become self-reinforcing through either habituated action or ideologically-grounded perceptions of avenues for action. This kind of flat yet uneven social world is important for understanding how people go about writing both across history and in specific moments of time. Furthermore, this flatness explains the ways in which situations can be constructed in ways that connect with other prior and future situations in meaningful ways through material tools.

Understanding human activity as situated, historical, and occurring in a flat, uneven social world allows this study to account for the complex world of schooling that the writing encountered occurs within. It also allows this study to draw upon a wide range of studies into writing activity, writing development, and changes in writing over time. In the next few sections, I apply this frame of understanding to past research into the history of schooling and writing development research.

## **Schools: The Situation of Writing Development**

Schooling in the United States, particularly at the K-12 levels, exists in a state of constant reform and regular interaction with many other institutions. This state of existence is an historical phenomenon: schooling has been codified through the actions of many within and without the school system into the institution that U.S. citizens today recognize as “school.” It is an institution shaped by other institutions (the federal government, for example), that also shapes other institutions (such as testing companies). Furthermore, these “other” institutions have grown and changed over time, shaping the growth of education even as education in turn shapes their growth. These institutions are mutually constitutive: they build one another and shape one another while also shaping themselves.

During its continuing growth with other institutions, schooling has endured near-constant reform. Some of these reforms have endured longer than others, and many have had a hand in the way that education is experienced by a teacher or student today. However, to say that education is nothing but a series of reforms would be inaccurate. The history of schooling does not read like a series of even, gradual changes: reforms in education may be ever-present, but their implementations are uneven, caught as they are within the gears of other reforms and multi-institutional interaction. The uneven success of different reforms has resulted in a durable educational system that is capable of withstanding even the most extreme of contemporary reform efforts. This was neither planned nor hoped for: the current school system is a goal aimed for by none yet accomplished by many. It is an unwieldy structure that creates as many problems as it solves, yet because it is so grounded in the lives of citizens, because it is so intricately linked with so many other institutions, schooling remains.



Public education in the U.S.—such as Goodland Middle School, the site of this particular study—is a durable system of interlocking reform efforts that have solidified, over time, into what Tyack and Cuban (1989) refer to as a *grammar of schooling*, or an historically situated set of organizational structures that are understood by the culture at large as “school.” Those in public education in the United States understand public schooling through this grammar, and through their actions contribute to the solidity of it. As teachers, students, administrators, and staff enter schools, they perform tasks that move the structure of schooling along into the future, making sense of their situations based on the ways that they have made sense of similar situations in the past. The structure of schooling is not a frame within which actors act, but a series of local reconstructions happening in different times and places as people continually remediate (Prior & Shipka, 2003) what “schooling” is through their understandings of the grammar of schooling. To avoid confusing the grammar of schooling with issues of grammar that will arise in later chapters, this will be referred to as *schooling structure* henceforth.

This view of U.S. education acknowledges that some of the core expectations that people hold about what school is—organized by subject matter, divided into age-based grades and classes, etc.—are based on a combination of historical precedent, social demand, and accident. If we return to the earlier definition of writing activity as the actions an individual completes while engaged in the task of writing and development as the orchestration of changes that lead to new understandings and control over writing over time, then we can see that growth in writing in schools is extremely complex and caught up within a rich set of interactive institutions that may not have writing or writing development as a main intention. If this is the case, then the situations within which students develop as

writers are (1) extremely complex and (2) fraught with a variety of complementary and competing demands. Past research has indicated what situations within this complicated environment look like, and what their impact is on the writing development of students. They clarify what, exactly, is going on in classrooms, and how those activities constitute, in part, the development of writing activity in students.

### **Writing in the Classroom: What are Students Doing?**

The pressures of the historically layered schooling situation beg an important question: what are students doing in the classroom to learn to write? This question has been explored regularly in the past few decades, with the work of Applebee and Langer (1985) as well as Hillocks (1986; 2002) leading the charge. Applebee (1981) indicates how rarely students actually perform writing of more than a paragraph, a trend that Hillocks (2002) follows up on in his later examination of the role of changing assessments on student learning, and one that Applebee and Langer (2013) follow up on in a future study as well.

Hillocks (2008) provides an overview of how writing has been approached in secondary schools throughout history. Beginning with the middle ages, Hillocks provides a clear trajectory to his readers that outlines how writing instruction came to be what it is today in secondary schools, which helps situate the writing development of contemporary students historically. It is in this text that the role of curricula on the developmental trajectory of students becomes clear. In his review of the organization of writing textbooks, Hillocks notes that “the idea that grammar makes writing possible is an old one and appears to be responsible for what has been called *the building block theory of writing development*” (l. 10630). Understandings of how writers develop that work themselves into the ether of social understanding become social facts, and these facts have consequences that impact the

developmental trajectories of the students who labor beneath those understandings. Although Hillocks provides extensive references to literature about how this theory impacts the curricula that students encounter, his own interpretation of the situation is entirely his own:

I suspect [...] that teachers do not proceed from an analysis of student writing to decide on the course of their teaching, but rather proceed automatically on the assumption that students must first learn to write correct sentences, then paragraphs, and then some sort of longer theme, which, more often than not, turns out to be a five-paragraph theme (the 5P) (l. 10644).

The question that arises from Hillocks, of course, is: how has this particular developmental path developed? The answer goes back to the historical layering discussed above: because of the pressures of different institutions that have developed in conjunction with other institutions over time, certain kinds of instruction, writing, and responding are considered and valued to some degree, while others are not. As Johnson, Smagorinsky, Thompson, and Fry (2003) indicate, the decision of what kinds of writing to assign is the result of a complex network of interacting demands within and without school walls. This interactive pressure is present not just for curricular decision making (i.e., using the five paragraph essay) but extends to decisions about activities within the daily classroom routine. Furthermore, as the institutional interaction that makes up these pressures shift, so do the kinds of developmental paths offered in schools.

Hillocks (2006) explores how classroom writing activity has changed over time, notably from the early 1980s to the early 2000s, with the advent of No Child Left Behind and a powerful increase in standardized assessments. When comparing the findings of Hillocks (2004) to those of Applebee (1981), Hillocks (2006) was able to identify some significant

changes and stabilities to the writing instruction that students encounter. Students in the twenty-first century are writing more (and at greater length) than their 1980s counterparts, at least in class. The classes that these students are in also commit more time to prewriting than classes of the past, and the nature of their assignments are more attentive to audience.

Hillocks (2006) also notes that “teachers appear to be preparing students more for writing than Applebee found” (p. 60). The students in contemporary classrooms participate in more peer review activities, more modeling activities, and more brainstorming activities than their earlier counterparts.

These changes, however, appear to be more about changes in quantity than quality. Hillocks (2006) notes that “there is an underlying similarity in the way writing was taught during the two periods. In both periods, teachers and curriculum makers assumed that the knowledge necessary for effective writing is general knowledge of a few principles that are applicable to all or most writing” (p. 60). Applebee and Langer (2013) provided further detail to Hillocks’ overview. Using data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), yearlong case studies of six middle and high schools, visits to twenty middle and high schools with local reputations for excellence and teaching writing, and “a national survey of 1,520 randomly selected middle and high school teachers,” (l. 578), they found that “a great deal of development in teachers’ conceptions of writing and its importance in learning” (l. 885), although these conceptions did not monumentally shift the purposes of writing in the classroom: “Writing as a way to study, learn, and go beyond—as a way to construct knowledge of generate new networks of understandings (Langer, 2011a, 2011b)—is rare” (l. 908). These findings indicate that although some of the details of writing within schools has changed (such as the quantity of writing, and the specific focal

elements of a given writing activity), the schooling structure has left the teaching of writing overall intact, with students encountering similar writing activities based on similar principles across years and decades. Clearly, the schooling structure has a powerful influence on the types and kinds of writing that students do.

This overview, however, should not give one the idea that writing instructors are at the beck and call of other social forces, and have no weight of their own. Instructional decisions have always brought to the classroom certain teaching ideological positions, and subsequent studies of various types have drawn out specific evidence, either in text or in writing activity, of the effects of those positions. Perhaps the most well known example of this is the “writing process,” encouraged through the work of Emig (1973), Elbow (1985) and many others.

Since the 1970s, teachers of writing have worked with the idea of the “writing process,” something that Graves (1981) works with in considerable depth, and something that has been, according to Dyson and Freedman (1990), difficult to work with in classrooms: “One difficulty is that there is no “writing process,” but a flexible process, one influenced by the kind of writing being attempted, the writer’s purpose and the situational conditions—by, in other words, the complex dimensions of literacy events discussed in our first section” (p. 13-14). The “writing process” as presented in classrooms is often more of a teaching tool than an accurate reflection of how writing occurs. As Dyson and Freedman (1990) point out, there are a great variety of different kinds of actions that go into the writing of any given work, and these actions are all influenced by the kind of writing being done, the purpose, and the situation.

The idea of the “writing process” certainly impacts the curricular decisions that students encounter, but other studies have examined the impact of different instructional approaches on how students develop as writers. These findings have elaborated on the complexity of the writing process that Dyson and Freedman indicate, and they have led to strategies for the intervention of instruction into the process of student writing. But, more importantly for this current review, they indicate what students are able to do cognitively—as well as how they do it—when they go about writing across the K-12 span.

The work of Graham and Harris (2000) has underscored that writing processes people engage in, however defined, are indeed fluid and multiple. They give an overview of the different processes through two key terms: self-regulation and transcription skills. Through a meta-analysis of several different articles on self-regulation, the authors claim that skilled writers are more self-regulated than non-skilled writers. By drawing on reports of self-regulation from struggling grade-school writers to accomplished 20<sup>th</sup>-century novelists, Graham and Harris conclude that developing writers become increasingly self-regulated with age and schooling, that self-regulatory strategies improve writing, and that differences in self-regulation produce differences in writing. The authors also tied transcription skills to the effects of finished written products as well as the process of creating those products, arguing—again from a meta-analysis of available literature—that individual differences in transcription skills can predict writing achievement, that the transcription skills of developing writers improves with age and schooling, that ignoring or eliminating transcription skills can, for certain populations, enhance writing performance, and that teaching transcription skills improves writing. Their meta-analysis provides a picture of developing writers as growing ever more self-regulated and skilled in transcription across time and instruction.

These two categories, self-regulation and transcription, cover a great deal of activity in writing. However, other studies, such as Graham and Perin (2007a) have broken down the activity of writing further, giving a more nuanced picture of how students go about the activity of writing in various situations. In an attempt to understand (1) what we know about teaching writing to middle and high school students, and (2) what we still need to know about teaching writing to middle school and high school students, Graham and Perin (2007a) build off of their earlier work (*Writing Next*, 2007b) to identify effective instructional practices for students from fourth to twelfth grade. Graham and Perin's (2007b) recommendations from *Writing Next* are valuable, but, according to Graham and Perin (2007a), are limited by three constraints: a limited body of scholarship (the authors limited themselves to effect sizes from four or more studies), a lack of recommendations from studies of small sample sizes, and a focus strictly on experimental and quasi-experimental studies. In *Writing Next*, they recommend eleven teaching strategies for writing: writing strategies, summarization, collaborative writing, specific product goals, word processing, sentence combining, pre-writing, inquiry activities, and a process writing approach. Each of these recommendations shapes the potential writing activity of the students whose teachers follow them. Furthermore, many (i.e., specific product goals, word processing, collaborative writing) involve social or physical elements. These recommendations, then, expand beyond the focal points of self-regulation and transcription, and indicate not only what students are already doing in classrooms, but how they can perform those activities to more effectively develop themselves as writers.

Graham and Perin (2007a) go beyond these recommendations by examining additional studies involving single-subject design and performing a meta-analysis of

qualitative research studies that “examined the practices of teachers or schools judged by either their performance or others as providing effective writing/literacy instruction” (p. 315). The authors predicted that including these studies would “extend the findings of *Writing Next* [...] by identifying other effective practices” and provide “an alternative lens for locating and identifying potentially effective practices” (p. 315). The authors found that effective writing teachers dedicate time to writing and writing instruction, involve students in various forms of writing over time, treat writing as a process, keep students engaged by involving them in thoughtful activities, teach with a variety of methods, provide guidance when teaching, encourage students to be self-regulated, create a positive environment, set high expectations for their students, and adapt writing instruction and assignments to the needs of individual students. They also found that more research on writing intervention must be conducted, writing research must be more deeply contextualized, and ways must be found to effectively combine the successful writing instruction practices found in both *Writing Next* and Graham and Perin (2007a).

These findings by Graham and Perin indicate a close interaction between instructional decision-making and the writing activity of students. Students no doubt encounter many (though probably not all) of the effective teaching practices suggested by Graham and Perin (2007a; 2007b), and these practices shape how students perceive the act of writing and understand the purposes of writing. However, the effective teaching practices themselves are only part of the complex social world within which students write. There are, additionally, issues of student-teacher interaction, the social make-up of the classroom, the limitations and possibilities of the physical classroom space, and the technological affordances that play into the act of writing in class. In short, the teaching practices that have developed over time,



including those found by Graham and Perin, occur through the grammar of schooling, and contribute, in some ways, to the propagation of the schooling structure over time.

The role of schooling structure is important to keep in mind because it is not an “influence” so much as it is a constitutive element of how students perceive and go about writing in schools. To say that the grammar of schooling “influences” the teaching of writing is actually inaccurate, and implies that, without schooling structure, the learning of writing would be able to proceed uninhibited. Rather, schooling structure is the result of interacting social forces that create opportunities for students to put pen to paper, and it is through these experiences (and these experiences primarily) that students learn to write. What “counts” as writing for students, then, is built through the limits and possibilities of schools: the limits of the school period, day, week, and year; the importance of quarter, semester, and final grades; the limitations of class size and classroom space; and the limits and possibilities of the technological resources that a school in question possesses—or that schools in general possess.

Schooling structure shapes not only how students learn to write but how we understand their learning to write, since our observations and work is limited by the limitations of the classroom. However, many experimental or quasi-experimental researchers have been able to toy with the fringes of schooling structure to measure the impact of different writing activities on the development of student writing. Working both with and against schooling structure has produced a wide range of knowledge (though, admittedly, a wide range of knowledge with some extremely wide gaps) about how students change as writers over time.

The work of Applebee (1981; 1984) and Applebee and Langer (1984; 2013) brings us back to the historical layering that impacts writing development, something that has gone unconsidered in a portion of previous research on writing development. Consider, for example, Hunt's (1970) analysis of syntactic maturity in students. Using sentence-combining activities, Hunt demonstrated that, as students age, they increase their T-unit length. While not arguing against the role of social structure in the increasing syntactic maturity of writers, Hunt does not argue for it, either, and much of his work seems to tacitly imply an internal developmental trajectory. Graves (1981) argues for a natural trajectory of learning to write, and indicates this preference throughout the interpretation of his research. However, the work of various historians of education, particularly that of Cuban (1986) and Tyack (1967), indicate that schooling is not only a historically constructed entity, but one that influences the kinds of learning and knowledge that students are able to do while they are in it. Writing has been taught in schools as long as schools have been around, and as the writing instruction changes, so, too, do the paths that writing development take.

We can see this influence in particular through the work of Dyson and Freedman (1990), who provide a review of literature on teaching writing. Beginning with the claim that "children...are first introduced to literacy within their homes and communities and within the social and emotional context of relationships" (p. 6), Dyson and Freedman take an historical view of writing and its influence on the development of both individuals and cultures. In their review of the literature, they trace out the impact of school curriculum on learning to write and, conversely, the impact of learning to write on socialization within schools. Drawing off of the work of Florio and Clark (1982) and Applebee (1981), they argue that "many school writing opportunities restrict children from intellectually and socially engaging

in the writing process. For example, writing's format and much of its content might be provided by a commercial publisher on a worksheet or by the teacher, as in board-work; in such cases, students do not have to formulate their own thoughts" (p. 9). The socially and historically situated forces upon which writing development is built are themselves the limits and constraints of writing activity development.

In the above two sections, I have (1) indicated the historically layered situation of schooling within which this study will fit and (2) explored what kinds of writing students do in those situations, and how prior research has explored that writing. This work indicates that writing activity is dependent in many ways on the kinds of instruction that students receive, although the instruction that students receive is often not derived strictly (or at all) from any empirical principles of writing development. Furthermore, students develop as writers very individually, which can blunt some of the effectiveness of the strategies that Graham, Perin, and others propose. The instructional choices of the teacher can have a powerful impact on how students develop as writers and, furthermore, the options that the teacher has for this (or perceives him- or herself as having) are informed by the grammar of schooling.

These researchers—on both schools and writing development—has begun to tease out answers to the research questions, as well as identify the many gaps to be filled in order to fully answer those questions. The ideas that the writing process is highly individualized, that writing activity is shaped heavily by the teachers in the classrooms, and that those classrooms are shaped by forces not focused on writing indicate the importance of paying close attention to the contexts within which writing occurs. Furthermore, these established findings indicate

paths of inquiry into which the methodology will be able to explore, provided that the theoretical framework in chapter two provides sufficient structure for doing so.

These tentative findings can be supplemented by past research on writing development—not the structure of schools, the way writing occurs in schools, or research-based recommendations for instruction, but a close look at how writing changes in students over time. In the next section, I present both the evolution of studies on writing development and the findings that this research has produced. A history of the research on writing development will situate the current study in the ever-unfolding stream of writing research, while the record of findings indicates how these studies—even narrow ones from years past—can inform this project.

### **The Expanding Views on Writing Development**

Issues of writing development have been examined through many lenses over the course of the past half-century or so. Early work on writing development was focused largely on the reduction of errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation (Sherwin, 1969). Thus, early methods of studying writing development were considerably narrower than the work that has occurred in the second half of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup>

A strong but late example of this early work is Hunt's (1970) work on syntactic maturity. Interested in the differences in sentence structures at various age levels, Hunt (1970) devised a test to see (1) if older students tended to write in longer clauses; (2) if older students tended to write in longer T-units; (3) if older students tended to use more sentence-

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<sup>2</sup> Hillocks (2006) breaks research in composition into three camps: pre-1963, 1963-1983, and 1984-2004. This breakup, while useful for Hillocks' own work, covers a wider swath of research in composition than is needed for the current purposes of this study.

combining transformation; (4) if there is a positive correlation between each of the three syntactic measures; (5) what other characteristics can be discerned; (6) if syntactic measures vary with mental maturity; and (7) if this measurement system was less expensive than larger scale analysis. To find answers to these issues, Hunt administered a test to 1,000 students in grades 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12 in public schools in Tallahassee, Florida. It was also given to two groups of adults: a “skilled” group and an “average” group. These subjects were presented with a series of thirty-two related sentences and were asked to “rewrite it in a better way” (p. 11-12). The results were analyzed according to number of words, clauses, T-units, and sentences. Hunt found that older students write in longer clauses and longer T-units. The differences between writing in high and low ability groups for T-unit and clause length is also statistically significant.

Hunt’s work is detailed, large scale, and thorough in many ways. Like much of the research before it, it looks carefully at what students (or skilled adults) put on a page, and it looks for changes over time—specifically, changes over more than a year. Hunt’s work was able to show a trajectory across most of the K-12 grade levels and into the adult working world of the 1960s. But these findings, although helpful, leave a great many questions to be answered. Why is it that student writing grows and changes in this way? There is nothing inherently good about a longer T-unit or a longer clause, so what is this growth and change a response to? Furthermore, since the study that Hunt performed was a carefully controlled study, and not a naturalistic study, it is unclear how strong the connection is between the writing that the students and adults did for this study and the writing that they perform independently.

In Hunt's work, then, we see no attention to the situational nature of writing, as well as a lack of concern about the history behind the changes that Hunt is seeing. The normal instability of interaction and the reproduction of social structure are lost in the objectified structure and language of Hunt's study. This is not to shortchange Hunt's findings, of course: there appears to be a trajectory of development in the way sentences are formed that can be followed over time, which was Hunt's goal. However, this study is looking for a more deeply contextualized way to approach such a situation.

Hunt's work, despite its faults, is monumentally important for both this study and the history of writing research for several reasons. First, it indicates a push away from merely counting errors or tracing problematic writing elements over time. It certainly isn't a complete push away from that, but it explores changes in writing in ways that the studies referenced by Sherwin (1969) do not. Second, Hunt is able to look closely at one aspect of the activity of writing that changes over time: the words on the page. Though not robust enough to answer the questions that I have, the work that Hunt has done provides a good starting point for looking into the changes that writers and writing go through.

Hunt's focus on the page leads one to wonder what is going on around the page, and particularly in more than one time and place. Research into the activity of writing—both in the classroom and out—began shortly after Hunt's (1970) publication with Emig's (1973) study of students across an entire school year. This work, along with the work of Elbow (1975), Shaughnessy (1978) and many others, began looking into the processes of writing that students went through.

Questions about the writing process were explored in considerable depth by Graves (1981), who moved away from the focus on the page that Hunt (1970) and other researchers

had and considered the natural environment within which students wrote, as well as the activities that occurred to create that writing. Graves followed sixteen children in five different classrooms over the course of two years to see the activity that they engaged in around their writing. Gathering data from interviews, observations, and written products, Graves concluded that (1) writing behavior is highly variable; (2) clusters of behaviors should be observed to inform decisions about writers; (3) scope and sequence in curricula do not help writers develop; (4) the scaffolding-conference approach is the best approach to the idiosyncratic writer; (5) students should be allowed to write regularly, for sustained periods of time, and at predictable intervals; (6) children should choose their topics; and (7) skills should be taught within the context of the student's own writing.

Graves, in his analysis of the writing activities of students, is able to indicate a great deal of what students can see through their writing: "Children show us what they see when they change something" (p. 16). Graves breaks up "problem solving"—the act of writing—into five categories: spelling, motor aesthetic, convention, topic information, and revision (p. 17). He indicates that students made their movement through these stages visible through their use of page space (i.e., adding information to the middle or end of a draft) and the declaration of their intentions (i.e., discussing changing something before actually changing it). Calkins (1981), in a later study of eight year olds' revision activities, identified four stages of revision: writing successive drafts without reference to earlier drafts; making refinements of minor consequence; shifting between refinements and abandoning drafts; and revising through interaction between draft and writer. In both the stages announced by Graves and the stages of revision claimed by Calkins, students show changes in their activity

that, to Graves and Calkins, indicate shifting understandings of the purpose and goals of writing.

These findings by Graves and his colleagues have proven both interesting and influential. For the purposes of this research, however, it is important to keep in mind some of the focal elements of Graves' work: time and space, internal to external, egocentric to sociocentric, and explicit to implicit. Each of these elements contains a developmental trajectory that Graves found in the work of the students he was studying. Graves examines time and space through a combination of the page, the process, and the information. Over time, students organize themselves on the page differently, go about the process of organizing differently, and begin including more and more information in a (relatively) planned and (relatively) orderly way. Over time, the writing activity of students also becomes internalized, socially centered, and selectively focused. These explanations of changes in writers, generally, provide useful indications of changes in writing in the earlier grades. Students begin writing with more control of the page, the information, and the process; orient themselves to a social world; internalize the writing process; and become more selective about the kinds of information they include.

Though this information is useful in understanding the larger issues of writing development in students over time, Graves' work is not without its setbacks, as Smagorinsky (1987) and Hillocks (1986) have pointed out. While these potential setbacks do not necessarily invalidate the work of Graves and his colleagues, they certainly challenge some of the understandings that he draws from his research, and these challenges can further shape this project's understandings of what facts Graves and his colleagues established during their close examination of student writers in New Hampshire.



Smagorinsky (1987) in particular challenges Graves' inclusion of context in his work, arguing "An examination of the research reports filed by Graves and his associates reveals [...] that they do not in fact give good account of the educational context. Their studies focus on certain students and observe them intensely, recording their behavior in a narrative string of anecdotes" (p. 332). Though not arguing that "Graves deserves his reputation as an innovative and sensitive educator," Smagorinsky claims that "What [Graves] and his followers call "research" is, I propose, instead reportage" (p. 333). One of the concerns that Smagorinsky has about Graves' conclusions is his attempt to "describe, without influencing them, children's stages of writing development" (p. 333). This is of particular concern to my own work, and the problem that Smagorinsky finds stems from Graves' concern for such a reporting of the progression of writing development. Smagorinsky goes on to point out several specific instances showing that the social constructions within which the child operates heavily influences writing development of some of the case studies in the classrooms that Graves observes.

Hillocks (1986), in his extensive review of research in written composition, also cautions some of the findings of Graves (1981), as well as some of the later publications by Calkins: "While the work of the New Hampshire team has considerable value, it is not without problems. One of the most serious of these is the tendency to advance explanations of cause and effect without considering alternatives" (p. 13). Hillocks, like Smagorinsky, notes that "Throughout the research by Graves and his colleagues [...] changes in writing behavior tend to be attributed to natural development" (p. 14). This claim of natural development is supported through two of Calkins' publications (1979; 1981), which focused on the revision process. Specifically, Calkins presents her work on Andrea, a student who,

she claims, is learning to internalize certain revision activities. Hillocks, however, argues that Calkins “presents only slight and unsystematic evidence that Andrea considered several alternative leads without writing them out” (p. 15). Furthermore, the subsequent argument that learning to make revision choices “develops from some innate sense in the child” actually “minimizes the role of the teacher” (p. 15).

That Graves and, later, Calkins indicated a “natural” progression of writing development is not very far afield from several influential theoretical frameworks in English instruction at the K-12 level. Many of the researchers (in particular, Britton and Moffett) who provided early weight to this field were heavily influenced by Piagetian perspectives, and Graves seems to have followed in those footsteps to some degree. The idea of a naturally-unfolding intellectual development in writing that is free of the bounds of instruction and experience has cropped up in many ways throughout literature on writing development. Moffett’s (1962) work on ladders of abstraction, though useful in many ways, is rooted in this idea of an unfolding natural progression of writing ability. Despite this concern, however, Moffett’s work can remain useful even without keeping older Piagetian concepts in mind. Graves, likewise, is able to point out a great deal about the writing activity of children in school through his work, even if the “natural development” trend that he works from is itself less than helpful.

Smagorinsky (1987) highlights the problems with Graves’ “natural” development ideas:

In Graves’s studies, the researchers claim that students arrive at certain decisions about their writing with no guidance (aside from the interventions) from the teachers or researchers. Yet the conclusions that the children come

to are always those predicted by the researchers. Is it possible that the researchers, and the teachers in the classrooms they are studying, are providing subtle and unconscious approval of certain decisions made by their students, and disapproval of undesirable decisions? (p. 338).

Thanks to Smagorinsky, we can see in the work of Graves (1981) a problem of unidentified instability in his assumptions: the writing development of children does not follow a natural progression, unattached to the world around it. While it may be true that there are some rather wide boundaries on what students are able to do (i.e., the muscle control to hold a pencil) at some points in their lives, the idea of an unfolding path of writing development as specific as the one Graves is looking for is not there. The theoretical framework upon which Graves builds, then, is linked to a natural stability that is not actually available.

Although the evidence that Smagorinsky and Hillocks put forward is considerable, my own reading of Graves' initial report, while agreeing with Smagorinsky's framing of "reportage" over research, did not necessarily see all of the research findings of Graves and his team as inclined toward a natural development. Although there are, indeed, moments where a reliance on the natural development of students jumps forward, it would be wrong to assume that the work of the New Hampshire team lacks value without that premise. In fact, Graves' conclusions rest on a trove of video data, child utterance data, direct observation, product data, and interview-conference data that has clear connections and implications for this project, and that show the process of learning to write as both (1) connected in some way to surrounding social circumstances and (2) a highly variable process. The descriptions of student activity that Graves and his colleagues show readers identifies writing activities that are changing in many ways, and these changes indicate the potential for examining writing

development by focusing on how the activity of producing writing changes, in addition to its changed final product.

For all of Smagorinsky and Hillocks' claims about the failures of Graves, his work was still able to focus, quite concretely, on the situations within which student writers chose to write. Graves' careful attention to the small changes in activity of student writers helped him discover the incredible variation in the way that students write. His analysis of student writing activity at several different ages led him to a list of "ingredients for writing" (Graves, 1981, p. 12) that "go underground and become implicit" as children age (p. 12). However, children internalize (or bring underground) these many "ingredients" at different rates and for different purposes: "every child had behavioral characteristics in the writing process that applied to that child alone" (p. 36).

Though sometimes guilty of "reportage," as Smagorinsky claims, Graves is still able to show a rich level of detail in the writing activities of students across grade levels and time. Despite his failure to identify a key instability in his theoretical framework, Graves was able to show the development of multiple school years and the smaller moments of time within that development. Furthermore, we are able to see something in the work of Graves that we are not in some more narrowly researched work: the progression of situations, the people, tools, and texts in those situations, and how some of those situations connect to one another. The work of Graves (1981)—along with all of the similar studies to follow out of the New Hampshire project—begins driving forward some of the important issues in writing development (situativity, historicity, and social flatness) discussed above. It underscores the value and potential of studying writing activity, of looking away from the final written product and toward the processes that go into action to create those products.

Graves (1981) looks closely at writing activity in naturalistic settings, which has its benefits. However, despite Graves's dismissal of experimental work, a great deal of tentative findings on writing development have occurred there as well, particularly for researchers who are interested in exploring writing development without the daily pull of classroom duties (i.e., the audience that Graves no doubt had in mind when questioning the power of experimental studies). Berninger, Fuller, and Whitaker (1996) explored writing development from a product and a process perspective. Berninger, et al (1996) outline some initial tendencies in the development of very young writers—"children first produce pictures without text, then letter-like nonletters, then true letters, then single words and series of words less than a clause in length, then clause-and sentence-length productions" (p. 194). While this sounds on the surface something similar to the natural developmental sequence that Graves (1981) was looking for, these findings are (1) confined to very young writing activity and (2) focused on the product end of writing. Drawing off of earlier research, particularly by Flower, Hayes, Scardamalia, Bereiter, Graham, Harris, and MacArthur, Berninger, et al (1996) identify three aspects of writing process from a cognitive perspective: planning, translating, and revising. These elements do not present a trajectory but rather a series of interactive elements that change within each writer over time. The authors provide an overview of the details (and proposed changes) to these three elements since their earliest inception. The authors also indicate, through their recent studies, the "algorithms" of young writers as they go about writing and the horizontal development of writing processes in skilled adult writers.

According to Berninger, et al (1996), "development can also proceed in a horizontal fashion within individuals at the same developmental stage, as they acquire expanded skills

at that stage of development” (p. 211). In a study of ten female students in a Masters degree program in school psychology, the authors found “considerable individual differences in how adult writers develop horizontally as they expand their writing expertise. Thus, writing development can proceed in both a longitudinal fashion, as illustrated in the first study, and a horizontal fashion, as illustrated in the second study” (p. 214). Horizontal development, for Berninger, et al, refers to the learning of new genres. Longitudinal development, on the other hand, references changes that occur with individuals over time, and in a direction that is considered to be “maturity.” The separation between “horizontal” and “longitudinal” development for this study, while possessing a commonsense logic to it, does not shed considerable light on writing development, as young children may engage with a wide variety of genres for a wide variety of purposes, just as an older, more established writer may. However, Berninger, et al (1996) are still able to identify interactive elements that change over time in writers (even if we are not able to see the purposes for which they change).

The work of Berninger, et al (1996) highlights a great deal of information that furthers this study’s understanding of how writing development occurs. The authors indicate a concern with the history of development in an individual through changes in planning, translating, and revising. The authors seem less concerned with the physical aspects of activity that their subjects engage in. While they are definitely concerned about the use of tools in writing and the products they create, the article does not give an overview of the ways in which these subjects used their surrounding environment to engage in writing, nor how that engagement changed over time.

The review thus far has shown the transition of studies of writing development away from a focus on the end products of punctuation, spelling, and grammar and into (1) the

activity of writing and (2) the situated cognitive activity through which research subjects engage with writing. These findings have given the current study some understanding of current thoughts on situativity, historicity, and uneven social flatness in considerations of writing development. While earlier sections established the importance of school history, the role of teachers, and the highly individualized writing processes involved in writing development, the research in this section indicates that there are social implications for how changes in writing are perceived (i.e., horizontally or longitudinally); writers change in their process, their products, and their intentions in many ways throughout their lives; and that the causes of changes in writing activity are complex and socially situated. Tracing the role of school structure on writing instruction indicates the social complexity of learning to write; following the history of studies about writing development indicates the messiness of individual writing development. What these findings have indicated about writing development, however, is that it happens, and it happens in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes. This kind of development has been measured in many ways, and the following section attempts to capture some of the detail of those measurements.

### **Change Over Time and the Writing Environment**

Beginning with the aforementioned earlier works that looked into the spelling, punctuation, and grammar of writers over time, many researchers have looked into the ways that writing changes over time. Hunt (1970) has indicated increasing syntactic complexity, something that the work of Hillocks (2002) and Applebee (1981) indicate may tie into instructional methods and the overall planned and unplanned scope and sequence of writing instruction. Increases in syntactic maturity aside, however, it is not exactly clear (1) how students change as writers over time and (2) the forces that impact these changes. Each

student is a wash of variables and uncertainty, and each attempt at writing has its own variables as well, making any attempts to trace trajectories something of a mess.

But this is not to say that searching for growth and change over time is impossible: in fact, just like Hunt (1970), many researchers have been able to indicate changes in final written production anywhere from ten days (Hillocks, 1978) to several years (Haswell, 2000). These findings generally indicate that all students can and do change as writers over time. Various experimental studies have confirmed the effects that instruction have on the written activities and final products of student writers, while other studies have indicated that these changes tend to persist over time. These findings indicate the value of taking a wider look at specific writing activities over time: since students can vary so much in their written products but seem to be influenced in the creation of those products by their training and environment, taking a close look at the details of the surroundings in which writers go about writing makes a great deal of sense.

Many studies have catalogued changes in student writing activity or students' written products at different age levels. Haswell (2000), through a careful pre- and post-test approach to examining changes in writing, was able to show definite writing development over time during a student's college career. While Haswell (2000) "makes no claims about the effect of instruction on these changes in student performance," the study still examined student writing from freshman year to junior year, and found through nine measures of writing that focused on the words students put on the page: holistic scores, length of sentences, word usage in free modification, etc. Hillocks (1979), through an experimental pre- and post-test approach, showed that observational activities could improve the level of detail in students' writing in as little as ten days. Haswell (1986) found, through a study of



the writing of average-aged freshman, sophomores, and beginning juniors—as well as post-graduate writers—that writing changed—on paper—in ways that “may be characterized as competent, more mature writing” (p. 1) during that time, based on measures of syntactic maturity, word choice, modifier use, and larger issues of organization and complexity.

Even though Haswell (2000; 1986) did not attempt to anchor the writing changes to instructional activity, these changes in writing could hardly be described as naturally unfolding: Hillocks (1986; 1982) found evidence of the effects of changes in instruction on student writing performance. Hillocks’ work was focused on older, college-aged students and primarily attentive to the finished product of pre- and post-tests, but he was nevertheless able to identify powerful changes in his meta-analysis that linked back to changes in instructional approaches.

This experimental work has accomplished two feats. First, it has clarified an important reality: students change as writers over time, from K-professional life. Second, it has connected these changes, to some degree, with the instructional environment of the students. This is not to say that students do not or cannot grow as writers beyond the walls of the classroom, but rather that what goes on inside of the classroom has a heavy impact on the writing that students are capable of completing.

Another important finding of these studies is that writing development can take place in short bursts of re-orientation to writing. Hillocks (1979) noted in his work on the effects of observational activities on writing that the observational activities may “prompt students to reorganize stimuli which they had received and, therefore, to verbalize different perceptions or different propositions” (p. 32). This re-orientation to writing, with students considering anew both what to look at through their writing and how to express that attention,

led to a change in writing in a brief period of time. Graham, MacArthur, and Fitzgerald (2012) also identify many kinds of writing instruction that bring about rapid and sustained changes in student approaches to writing.

These experimental and meta-analytical findings in the literature on writing development have proven that students develop as writers over time, that this development is influenced by the instructional environment within which the development occurs, and that the development can be seen in both short periods of time (i.e., Hillocks, 1979) and across years (i.e., Haswell, 2000). That is, the ways in which students develop as writers are constructed by and with their environments, and—in formal school settings—instruction is a powerful element of the environment within which writing development happens. The valuable implications in these studies for the current project is not in the specific findings but in the general conclusions: because students do grow and change over time, because that change is connected to instructional decision-making, and because the change can increase at different speeds depending on both the individual and the instructional decision-making, the research questions proposed at the start of this chapter are both coherent and answerable, given current knowledge on writing development.

The above discussion has reviewed, in some depth, the expectations for writing (and the pressures that create those expectations) within schools, how writing instruction has changed over time, what students do to write in the classroom, and how students change as writers over time. Past research on writing studies has provided important connections between the development of writers over time and the environment within which they are tasked with completing their writing. The literature also has provided multiple measures of how students change over time, either through statistically significant changes in their final

products, or through alterations in the goals and activity of writing. In short, the activity of writing, the product of writing, and the environment and society within which that writing occurs are all intertwined in complex ways that have been at least partially teased out by previous research.

This review has brought together findings from Graves (1981) to Graham, Fitzgerald, and Harris (2012). Graves identified small but significant changes in the writing activities of students (although he may have generalized excessively and attributed those changes to unstable aspects of his theoretical framework). The work of Hillocks, Haswell, Graham, Berninger, and many others tracked the changes in written products over time, and also correlated those changes with the instructional activity that the students encountered. Furthermore, these changes in instructional activity were themselves, through the work of Applebee, Langer, Hillocks, and others, connected to the limits and possibilities offered by the structure of schooling. Through each of these focal elements on the study of writing development, we can see how situativity, historicity, and uneven social flatness play out in our current understanding of how writing development occurs over time.

### **Establishing Context: Studies of Located Writing Activity**

The above research on how students develop as writers, what activities they engage in within their classrooms, and how the changes that they undergo can be connected to the contexts within which they write indicate that the individual writer develops within an intricate network of interactions with others. Because of the power of the schooling structure and the large presence that schooling has in the lives of growing students, the writing that students engage in throughout the school day heavily impacts their writing activity development. In short, the situations within which writers make sense of their activities is,

oftentimes, constructed within the classroom. Current ethnographic studies of how students interact with others and the world around them over time helps to point out the complex networks within which students learn to write, and make clear the power that Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) has on analyzing individual student writing activity in chapter two.

Studies of the classroom writing activity of students has long identified how talk is at first mirrored by and then used to supplement the written word as young children develop their written capacities (Britton, 1970; Dyson, 1983). Dyson (1983), in her quest to see how early developing writers made sense of written symbols, acted as a participant-observer in a kindergarten classroom for a year to determine how students developed as writers in a “Writing Center” throughout the school year. Dyson collected records of spontaneous talk, interventions, observational notes, written products, and a daily research journal, “classifying and reclassifying data under different organizers” in order to determine “a comprehensive description and interpretation of the children’s behaviors” (p. 9) from the perspective of the child. Dyson found that students wrote in *writing episodes* constituted by four overlapping, recursive components: message formulation, message encoding, mechanical formation, and message decoding (p. 10). Within these episodes, students used oral language as “a tool for seeking needed information, assisting self in encoding and decoding and, finally, distancing self from work (i.e., expressing evaluations of completed work)” (Dyson, 1983, p. 17). She concludes that writing begins as a form of graphic representation and moves toward a form of language (i.e., orthographic representation) over time and with experience.

What Dyson (1983) shows is a group of students (and, in her article, a single case example: Viva) who take up the tools available to them in order to accomplish widely

varying tasks that involve some form of writing in kindergarten. As the school year moves along, as students are given more opportunities to engage in writing, and as their motor coordination continues to develop, students begin approaching writing differently, seeing it as a representation of language that can accomplish tasks for them. For the young students that Dyson observes, and also for the even younger children that Rowe (2008) discusses, children move gradually more distant from written text over time, and their written products become less dependent on the activity around that writing (up to and including talk).

Dyson's (1983) work did not address the issue of instruction as a matter of choice: the purpose of the study was to see how students came to understand writing across a school year, and the writing that the students did to show this occurred during a relatively instruction-free daily period. In a later study, Dyson (2008) explored the impact of high-stakes, testing-oriented writing instruction on how students went about the act of writing. She examines how children use the interactive structures of the school day to "inform their sense of what to do—or how to maneuver—to be a competent participant in the official school world" (p. 122). Dyson was particularly taken by how students interpreted "what was required during official writing" (p. 127). She found that the children in Mrs. Kay's classroom engaged in both official and unofficial writing activity, and that each often supported the other in myriad ways, both through the process of writing and in the final written product: "the very way that children may spin off meanings in a carefully modeled curriculum, their ready appropriation of appealing practices and salient graphics, suggest the wealth of intellectual and sociocultural resources pushing on and acting under curricular boundaries" (p. 156).

The students that Dyson (2008) observes have their writing development directed heavily by the activity of the classroom—for it is the classroom activity that provides them

with writing tools, writing time, and even writing topics—but this activity is not the sole arbiter of writing development. Instead, classroom writing activity serves as a mechanism that shapes the ways in which students draw off of their many resources to shape their writing activity. The power of classroom writing activity, it would seem, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for writing development. It provides direction, but not the sole direction, and the direction that the instructor provides may be appropriated in many ways, both large and small, by the students throughout the school year.

The two studies above by Dyson show that students change in their understandings of writing across the school year, and that these changes in their understanding are shaped in many ways, although the writing activity of the classroom does have a powerful impact. Through the instructor's tactical decisions about how to go about writing instruction (which are shaped by the strategic concerns of a department, a school, or a board of education), students are provided with tools, tasks, and even dialogue for engaging with writing. Students then can use these elements to engage in unofficial behavior around and through the act of writing.

Dyson's (2008) study was only part of a much larger analysis (Dyson, 2013) that examined kindergarten and first grade students in two "at risk" classrooms. She asks "is it sensible, or clarifying, to treat written language as a static set of rules?" (l. 358). Dyson (2013) expands on the earlier quest (i.e., Dyson, 2008) to "take the children seriously" and examine how students make sense of their instructional environment and take up the tools around them to accomplish goals that both they and their teachers establish.

According to Dyson (2013), who "observed the children's unofficial actions and interactions, heard their fix-it concerns, and studied how they organized themselves within

social relations and emerging but unofficial practices” (l. 3852), “In official worlds, the conventional basics are a set of technical skills” (l. 3866), while the children learning those technical skills “were not so much learning skills as figuring out how to participate in the socially organized world of school” (l. 3870). This gap between official intent and unofficial activity can pose a problem, as “without official acknowledgement, it may lead them to view their own linguistic and semiotic experiences as irrelevant to schooling” (l. 3917). Dyson’s reimagined set of “basics” involves having students think about “*adjusting Standard English usage*” and “focusing on *writing more/drawing less*” (italics in original) (l. 3921). These suggestions emerge from Dyson’s understanding that students can be more successful in official genres (and future, unknown genres) if they are capable of drawing from their vast repertoire of knowledge in their unofficial classroom worlds. She also uses her findings to suggest specific principles for writing instruction in young students: (1) that writing programs for young children should be based on play, talk, and social relations; (2) that, since children attend to their everyday environments, teachers should do the same to encourage students to build on their knowledge; (3) that children should have the opportunity to build an appreciation for language variation; (4) that contemporary literacy practices should deliberately normalize multimodality; (5) that the tasks provided to students should have “scope,” or multiple ways for students to engage with them; (6) that teachers need to understand that children’s composing actions vary across communicative situations; and (7) that a public forum for child writing should be present in the classroom. These principles, as well as the materials that led to them, underscore the power of the classroom community in directing the kinds of writing activity that are encouraged or rendered “invisible” in students’ interpretation and understanding of the act of writing.

Dyson (1983; 2008; 2013) successfully identified valuable facts about how classrooms influence the development of writing in students, and how the social makeup and direction of the classroom can influence how these students engage in and take up writing across the school year. Of course, Dyson's studies were on much younger students than those I studied, but Dyson's findings about the impact of classroom structure, classroom community, and classroom language on the development of students' writing has been echoed across classrooms of all ages. McCarthy (1987), by following "Dave" from one classroom to another, discovered that "writing development is, in part, context-dependent" (p. 261), and that "when we ask what students learn from and about writing classrooms, we must not only look at particular assignments or at students' written products. We must also look at what they learn from the social contexts those classrooms provide for learning" (p. 261). Sternglass (1997), in her longitudinal studies of college students, carries the social contexts beyond classroom walls, showing through rich case studies the powerful impact that social contexts outside of school can have on in-class performance and perceptions of performance.

Sternglass's (1997) findings, important as they are, does not discount the value of examining individual locations such as classrooms, as Dyson (1983; 2008; 2013) and so many others have done. Swales (1997) makes a case for the power of place-based discourse communities (what he refers to as a Place Discourse Community) in his study of separate writing cultures on different floors of one university building. Prior's (1998) findings show that, through texts, a Place Discourse Community (though he does not use the term) can carry beyond the walls of the classroom in complex ways.

Prior (1998), in his study of graduate students' writing over time, examined closely the social contexts within which his subjects wrote—both in graduate seminars and through



contexts created for written texts. Through these studies, Prior saw that “the synoptic image of a writing task multiplies and fragments along many dimensions, not just representations of the task, and for many reasons, not just students’ prior experience of school writing” (p. 37). That is, given writing activities were constructed in many different ways through the use of talk, tools, and texts in different times and places, and these multiple reconstructions come together in many ways to create the experience of writing, responding to writing, grading, and participating in a given course.

The work of Dyson (1983; 2008; 2013) has indicated the power that classroom social contexts have on writing development, while the work of Swales (1997) and Prior (1998) have shown how these contexts can go beyond the walls of the classroom and influence writing development in many ways, just as Sternglass (1997) has shown the impact of outside-the-classroom forces on writing development in students over time. These studies, when linked with the earlier review of literature on writing development and writing in the school system, highlight the social nature of learning to write, and indicate the importance of the surrounding community in one’s writing development, as well as one’s agency in taking up the developmental aspects of that community. In considering writing activity development in students, then, this project will have to examine not only the process and product of individual student writing, but also the social contexts within which that writing occurs. Writing instruction, as Dyson (2013) shows, is a powerful shaping force in writing development, but it is not the only force, and students often engage in unofficial writing practices to supplement the official curriculum. In order to fully answer the research questions posed at the start of this chapter, it will be necessary to see not only how individual writers engage in writing differently throughout the year, but what happens in their

surrounding environment throughout the year, and how their actions contribute to the continuation of the classroom community's official and unofficial approaches to writing.

### **Creating a Theoretical Framework**

This review of the literature has been a springboard not only into the gaps in the field but into the ways in which I can more carefully explore the records that I have. The literature, theoretical framing, and methodology of this project are interacting elements, each reinforcing the position of the others. The literature on the writing development and the development of writing in schools has indicated a partial way forward to answering the research questions above. It has provided indications about how students tend to change as writers in school over time, the complexities of classroom relationships and their impact on writing, the possibilities of writing development through student-teacher interactions, and the impact of the historical layering of schools on the growth of student writers over time.

In chapter two, I carry out some of the indications addressed above into the theoretical underpinnings of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), phenomenology, ethnomethodology, and sociology in order to construct a research frame that can address the above questions and indicate a useful methodology. This framework springs from the current standing of the field on the concept of writing activity development as discussed above, and leads to the methodological considerations in chapters three and four.

The methodological choices that I make in chapter three lead, in turn, to the conclusions that I draw out in chapters five and six. Chapter four, in particular, serves as a bridge of detail and organization between my methodology and my findings that prevents my findings in chapters five and six from sliding into anecdotal evidence or an endless story of

detail. Instead of seeming to present randomly selected moments of change, I use chapter four to indicate how these moments of change are selected, why, and under what conditions.

Chapters five and six, then, present in detail the moments of literate act transformation that I theorize and empirically discern in the earlier chapters. Chapter five identifies powerful literate acts and analyzes those acts through the lenses proposed in chapter four and connects those acts together in chains that carry across situations and writing activities. Chapter six expands the view on these literate acts and provides clear answers to the research questions proposed. These findings are then abstracted for chapter seven, which presents the implications of these findings for research on writing instruction as well as theoretical perspectives on how students go about learning to write.

## **Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework**

Chapter one introduced the focal research questions of this study and situated those questions within the existing literature on writing development. This review made clear that writing changes over time as students move through their schooling years, and that these changes can also be seen through alterations in their writing activity. Furthermore, these changes (both in final written product and in the process of creating that product) is caught up within and constructed by the context within which it occurs. In this chapter, I draw off of work in activity theory, ethnomethodology, phenomenology, and sociology to construct a theoretical frame that builds from the cornerstones and prior research findings established in chapter one.

This theoretical framework not only addresses the situational aspect of writing activity development, but also indicates methodological possibilities that will be addressed in chapters three and four. Prior research on writing development has examined writing from many different angles and through many different theories, but the findings of these studies have not provided a thorough understanding of the meaningful activity changes that occur over time in ways that account for the understandings, expectations, and intentions that actors bring with them to a given writing situation. The theoretical framework proposed here, by focusing on the situational realities within which individuals live and the activity systems of which they are part, both indicates methods for examining meaningful writing activity changes and ways of putting those examinations in dialogue with other theoretical frames and research approaches.

## **The Active, Situational Nature of Personhood**

This theoretical framework treats the individual as (1) active and (2) situational. This builds off of the concept of situativity in chapter one. People are not just in situations—their very personhood, their status as “people,” is defined by their activity within chains of ongoing situations. People are always performing actions, and those actions are made socially meaningful by the situations that they co-construct with others in those situations. The basis of this framework, then, lies in the understanding that at the fundamental basics of humanity lie activity-within-situations.

Activity-within-situations is also historical in nature because situations are always chained together (i.e., one occurs after the other) and defined as situations by the persons performing the activity. Thus, situated activity reproduces itself over time through the conscious attention of those engaged in it.

This position—that personhood is defined by the actions of human beings within chains of situations over time—springs from the attempt to answer the research questions posed in the previous chapter: in order to see what kinds of writing students do in school and how their writing activity changes over time, it is necessary to understand personhood as dependent upon situated activity. This pulls the focus of the theoretical frame away from natural trajectories and constant instabilities: since people in situations are defining themselves through their actions and their situations, the idea of personhood expands both outward into the surrounding environment and backward in time.

This concept of situated, active personhood has its roots in two places: first, in the Garfinkel’s (1967) and Mehan & Wood’s (1975a; 1975b) work on ethnomethodology and constitutive ethnography; second, in the microethnographic work of Bloome, et al (2005).

These theoretical perspectives have some strong divides, but the work of Bloome, Power Carter, Morten Christiansen, Otto, and Stuart-Faris (2005) makes a strong case for active personhood that is both aligned with Garfinkel (2002) and Schutz (1967) and capable of presenting clearly the complex aspects of personhood that this theoretical frame embraces.

Personhood, according to Bloome, et al (2005), is “socially constructed (Gergen & Davis, 1985) through symbolic action (Shweder & Miller, 1985); it is not given or predetermined. Whenever people interact with each other, they are always negotiating personhood” (p. 3). Furthermore, since “people are active agents in and on the worlds in which they live,” (p. 4) these social constructions that occur do so *in activity*, which means that persons are not abstract entities but rather situated, active agents defined by both the situation and the activity. Mehan and Wood (1975b) likewise argue for situational, active definitions of personhood, but situate that personhood within a past history that is used to construct a body of knowledge, which, in turn, creates a permeable, fragile reality for the person-in-action. Garfinkel (2002), who focused more on the activity of a given moment than the historical unfolding of that moment, also argues for sense-making on the situational level, and through his argument for reflexive, indexical sense-making is able to provide convincing proof for situationally dependent definitions of personhood.

Accepting the active, situational personhood as the groundwork for the remainder of the study performs two tasks, one methodological and one theoretical. Methodologically, it points the attention of the researcher to the person-in-activity—or, to put it another way, the person-in-context. By keeping the research subject as part of the situation within which the person is being studied, the context of the classroom at Goodland Middle School can be effectively accounted for. Furthermore, the historical aspects of active, situational

personhood that Mehan and Wood (1975b) point out reach back into past experience and make the person-in-activity capable of drawing from and reshaping that experience as the situation requires. Theoretically, accepting an active, situational personhood points toward further research on how situations are constructed by interactive agents on a moment-to-moment basis. It also further underscores the importance of a flat yet uneven series of localities that make up the social world, as was established in chapter one: that is, since there are no “larger social forces,” each social pressure can be conceived of as emerging from the establishment of someone in some social situation with greater reach into other, more distant localities through smoothed inter-local connections. Research through the lenses of phenomenology and ethnomethodology (the focus of the next two sections, respectively) indicates how these individuals-in-activity break down, understand, and expand their understandings of the world around them while, at the same time, reinforcing those understandings and perpetuating that world further.

### **The Phenomenologically Experienced World**

This theoretical framework relies heavily upon ethnomethodological study, structuration, Pragmatism, and activity theory, but phenomenology, being one of the roots of ethnomethodology (or, at least, at the roots of ethnomethodology as described by Garfinkel) and a common partner of activity theory, provides a useful starting point for understanding how this framework emerges. In this section, I provide a description of phenomenology and review some of its pertinent beliefs. I will then draw out the connections between phenomenology’s beliefs and ethnomethodology’s developments.

Phenomenology has proven a successful theoretical frame through which Writing Studies scholars have come to understand the writing activity of the subjects that they study.

This, in part, is because of the power that phenomenology has in helping researchers understand the ways in which individuals perceive the social world while, at the same time, contributing to the reproduction of that social world. With sociological phenomenology, Schutz (1967), drawing off of the phenomenological work of Husserl and the sociological work of Weber, creates not only an understanding of how social structures operate but also an understanding of how people encounter those social structures. Schutz argues that people live in an ongoing stream of experience. Human beings encounter “stuff” nonstop from birth to death. However, encountering people and artifacts does not lead one to understand them: similarly to driving along a highway, oblivious to the flora on the side of the road, encountering phenomena without accounting for it does not allow us to do anything with it. In order to make use of this experience, one must step out of the constant stream of experience, bracket a given strip of past experience, and lift it out of the ongoing stream to determine what happened. This backward glance is described by Schutz (1967) as a “cone of light” (p. 70) reflecting back from the ever-unfolding present. The bracketing of an element with this “cone of light” provides people with the interpretive tools that they need to understand similar experiences in the future.

Since “*the act of attention...*presupposes an elapsed, passed-away experience” (p. 51), all of the experiences that are given attention (i.e., bracketed) need to be in the past to a greater or lesser degree. This is true of unfolding situations, which have an element of “pastness” in that they have in part already occurred, and our cone of reflective light can be directed toward that immediate past to make decisions as the event continues to unfold. This does not deter a person from being able to project goals into the future, as they can be framed from past experience and used to make decisions about how to interpret and take up the



events of the immediate past. In these situations “*the planned act bears the temporal character of pastness*” (Schutz, 1967, p. 61, emphasis in original) since, when the actor set the goal, the goal was portrayed to the actor as completed, and as the goal evolves, it is “pictured as if it were simultaneously past and future” (p. 61). This use of the past in determining future action is complemented by the mental construction of ideal types.

Schutz (1967) takes the idea of ideal types from Weber, but several issues with Weber’s use of the term causes him to rethink them on his own terms. A person creates these types by first witnessing an act. The person then interprets that act through the perceived motives of the person who performed it, and “this motive is postulated as constant for the act regardless of who performs the act or what his subjective experiences are at the time” (p. 188). The person who witnessed the act then postulates “the existence of a person...whose actual living motive could be the objective context of meaning already chosen to define a typical action” (p. 189). The creation of such types, which prove quite malleable and, in the case of personal relationships, dismissable, help people organize the world and determine how to act within it.

What Schutz shows through his use of ideal types is the ways in which people simplify the world in order to act within it. People work off of the knowledge that they have given the bracketing they have done with the stream of their experiences. This process of simplification is part of the overall bracketing strategy discussed above: people bound events within their past and pull them out shorn of what are perceived as nonessential details for use in future action. Simplification can create problems, as Evans (2003) noticed when she found teachers in two college classrooms falling easily into transmission and deficit models of thinking. These teachers understood, intellectually, that the transmission and deficit

models of thinking about students disenfranchised students and obscured their real growth. However, their past experience working with such a model, along with the seeming straightforwardness of it, continued to lead them back to thinking about transmissions and deficits.

The work of Schutz and other phenomenologically driven research has revealed how people use typifications to make sense of the world around them. Their research has also underscored the power of those typifications in perpetuating themselves: in acting toward the world in a certain way, we bring about certain courses of events that lead the world around us to continue to behave in a given manner, at least to a certain extent. This does not mean that our understandings of the world (i.e., our typifications) cannot be changed: indeed, reorganizing our understandings of the world changes the ways that we behave in it. The work of ethnomethodology, as well as the work of Bazerman (1994c) in attempting to bring ethnomethodology into dialogue with both phenomenological research and Writing Studies, further fleshes out how our these typifications are spun into being in our minds through interactions with others.

### **The Interactional Nature of Reality**

Schutz's phenomenological argument provided a strong theoretical lens to the field of sociology and, later, to Writing Studies as well. Work on the study of writing through a phenomenologically-based lens, particularly when paired with activity theory and Pragmatism (Prior, 2008), has been particularly powerful and revealing. Many of these studies, however, have been on experienced writers. These writers are already well versed in writing activity, and their ability to call on types that have been established by past experience directs a good deal of their writing activity. Younger writers, such as those

explored in the current study, neither write in solitude nor draw much of their understandings from types. Instead, younger writers tend to talk their topics into being during classroom activity. They form their understandings of the necessary types as they write. In order to access this activity, I draw from the work of Garfinkel (1967; 2002; 2004) as well as Mehan (1979) and Mehan and Wood (1975b) in order to make sense of student activity as those types became talked into being.

Peyrot (1982) makes it clear that “the discovery of the organizations of ordinary activities” is the central thrust of ethnomethodology (p. 275). Drawing from phenomenology, ethnomethodologists argue that people make sense of their world through ongoing streams of experience, and that, as people enter sites of activity (which they always are), they work with the tools and people at that site, as well as past similar activities, in order to make sense of things. Peyrot (1982) argues that ethnomethodology is neither a subjective nor an objective approach to understanding the world: rather, it claims that “the features of an action are dependent on its relations with the other actions with which it participates in a mutually constitutive organization of activity” (p. 278). The focus in ethnomethodology is on the organization of activity, particularly through the mutual participation of co-actors in a given situation. This is a different focus (though not an opposite focus) than phenomenological work, something that Mehan and Wood (1975b) expands on considerably.

Mehan and Wood (1975b) clearly explain the differences between how ethnomethodologists and sociologists view reality: “Sociologists define “social interaction” as a process in which people communicate using symbols with common meanings” while, on the other hand, “Ethnomethodologists treat sociology’s implicit resource of an external world independent of interaction as a phenomenon [...] For then, interaction is activity that

accomplishes a sense of an external world. Meaning is viewed as ceaseless sensuous activity” (p. 5). Mehan and Wood’s separation here helps clarify how the theoretical framework of this work treats reality. Reality, as Mehan and Wood (1975b) argue, is constructed through interaction with five *incorrigible propositions*<sup>3</sup>, or elements that “appear as facts of the external world due to the ethnomethodologist’s unquestioned assumption that they constitute the world” (p. 14). These five features are (1) the reflexive<sup>4</sup> use of (2) a body of knowledge in (3) interaction to ceaselessly create a (4) fragile, (5) permeable reality. Mehan and Wood take a step away from the work of Schutz (1962) in his work on reality, arguing that “For Schutz [...] the reality of everyday life is the *one* paramount reality. Schutz says that this paramount reality consists of a number of presuppositions or assumptions, which include the assumption of a tacit, taken for granted world; an assumed practical interest in that world; and an assumption that the world is intersubjective” (p. 31). Mehan and Wood (1975b), however, contends that “every reality is equally real. No single reality contains more of the truth than any other. [...] Because every reality exhibits the absolutist tendency I mentioned earlier, there is no way to look from the window of one reality at others without seeing yourself” (p. 31). Making his concept of reality akin to Wittgenstein’s “forms of life,”

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<sup>3</sup> The theory of the middle range approach mentioned in Chapter Seven will also address propositions in a similar manner.

<sup>4</sup> In his work, Mehan (1975) expands considerably on the idea of “reflexivity,” pointing out four different camps in the field of sociology that use the term to mean different things. Mehan presents, after reviewing these positions, the argument that “Reflexivity will exhaust us long before we exhaust it” (p. 159).

Mehan and Wood (1975b) argue powerfully for a recognition of multiple realities: “Forms of life are always forms of life forming. Realities are always realities becoming” (p. 32).

Mehan and Wood propose a view of reality as fragmented, varied, and, in the end, fragile and permeable.<sup>5</sup> Most important, however, is Mehan and Wood’s argument that realities are formed through interaction with others. We do not make our own realities, but rather co-construct them with other actors who are present to varying degrees.<sup>6</sup> This work keeps that understanding of reality in mind as it attempts to understand how students and teachers make sense of their situations and the writing tasks with which they become involved. Reality is not a given but a result of social interaction (that is, an accomplishment), and the realities constructed within those social interactions are both fragile and permeable. However, those realities contain their own incorrigible propositions that allow those in the social interaction to both preserve their realities for future interaction and internalize that reality for future interactions with others.

This ethnomethodological stance on reality brings together the active nature of personhood and the phenomenological nature of the world discussed above. If we must understand people by understanding the person-in-activity, and the world itself as phenomenologically experienced, then the ethnomethodological stance on reality as proposed

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<sup>5</sup> The permeability and fragility of reality is important in two ways: first, it permits the researcher to break into and identify the fragmentation of reality; second, it requires the actors in a reality to constantly work to maintain the realities within which they live.

<sup>6</sup> This somewhat vague phrasing is an attempt to account for those whose views are present through distantiated means: texts, tools, memory, etc. The following section is devoted to the analysis of internalized interaction and how that contributes to the reproduction of reality.

by Mehan and Wood (1975b) both clarifies how a person-in-activity makes tenuous sense of the world (thus establishing understanding as both historically based and situationally defined) and explains how a phenomenological view of the world may be entered, shared, and understood. In short, the social accomplishment of actors working together to make sense of the situation serves as the groundwork for the types and concepts that emerge and are later used by others.

This process of interaction-as-groundwork can be more clearly seen through the work of Bazerman (1994c), in his analysis of the intersubjective establishment of a personal understanding of the moment. Bazerman begins his analysis with the idea of *kairos*, or “rhetorical moment,” which “stands at many intersections: between past and future, between perception and action, between context and agency, between the self and other, between the familiar and the novel, between structure and improvisation, between private and public, between psychology and sociology” (p. 171). Drawing from the work of ethnomethodologists and phenomenologists, Bazerman argues for the construction of *kairotic* moments as both individuated and socially based: “What we choose to attend to, what evokes our concern, what series of events we feel intersects with our goals and interests and goals, and therefore what intersection of perceived events and intentions that we identify as coming together as discrete moments are all matters of personal sense-making” (p. 176). Through a brief description of “Landscape with the Fall of Icarus,” Bazerman explains how we identify moments “particularly worthy of our attention” (p. 176) and how those moments are selected, informed by, and reinforced with “our conscious and unconscious mental constructs of the world as well as by those habits and regularized practices that create uniformity in our behavior” (p. 177). Our personal decisions about what to pay attention to, what to do, and

why we did it emerge from interaction on a moment-by-moment basis with others and over time.

The previous three sections have established (1) a case for the active, situational nature of personhood; (2) the ways in which types and concepts shape our understandings of the world around us; and (3) the intersubjective, historically situated nature of our understandings of situations over time. These three elements of the theoretical framework indicate the value of looking at writing activity development as situational—that is, as identifying how individuals construct, understand, and act from “writing situations” as they emerge—as well as how changes of activity within those situations over time can indicate shifted understandings of writing and writing activity, both in terms of conscious attention and situationally-bound shifts in organizing for that conscious attention. The remainder of this chapter expands on these elements in two directions: in the continued development of the individual, and in the networked activity systems within which the individual exists. The process of internalization can point the way toward identifying cues for identifying internalization in the students examined during this study, and placing that internalizing activity within social networks of others can indicate how to follow the social and historical chains of activity that lead to that internalization.

### **The Internalization of Interaction**

Ethnomethodological assumptions—along with their empirical support—make a clear case for the importance of interaction in a given situation, and clarify that reality is what those involved in an interaction make it to be (and, furthermore, that the reality they build is informed by their past reality-building experiences). Furthermore, it has become clear through those studies that interactions are historically situated, and that people bring with

them into interactions the expectations that spring from past performances. However, what is not quite clear through ethnomethodological discussion is the process by which these interactions are carried from one situation to another, how they are called up and acted upon. For that, we can turn to the work of Vygotsky (1978; 1971) and the work of later scholars building off of Vygotsky (i.e., Bazerman, 2012; 2013).

Vygotsky (1978) argues persuasively that the internalization of speech into thought is not a 1:1 act between the external and internal world. Instead, he claims that language, events, and activities go through a complex process before being internalized. Bazerman (2012) argues that this now-internalized world goes through *another* complex process before being externalized again. This process is evident through the clear differences indicated in thought and language: “The cases of pathological dissolution and involution of functions [...] indicate that the *relation* between thought and speech is not an unchangeable one” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 153). The investigations of Vygotsky and others identified four stages in the development of speech: the natural stage, naïve psychology, the use of external signs, and the ingrown stage (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 172-173). Vygotsky argues that this final stage, the “ingrown stage,” is that of the internalization of language and speech. “The external operation,” writes Vygotsky (1978), “turns inward and undergoes a profound change in the process. The child begins to count in his head, to use “logical memory,” that is, to operate with inherent relations and inner signs. In speech development this is the final stage of inner, soundless speech” (p. 173). This speech, Vygotsky goes on to say, becomes intertwined with “a vast area of thought that has no direct relation to speech. The thinking manifested in the use of tools belongs in this area, as does practical intellect in general” (p. 174). This blend of



verbal and nonverbal mental activity complicates the process of thought beyond what would be apparent in speech and interaction.

Bazerman (2012), in his explanation of the internalization and externalization of disciplinary concepts, claims that “if the internalized concept has serious developmental consequences and interacts with other functional systems (that is, structures of concepts, affects, and mental practices mobilized in addressing problems or challenges—or what might be called purposive structures of thoughts and feelings), it will likely be substantially transformed as it reemerges” (p. 10). This argument is what leads us from the uncertainty of situational carryover as indicated through ethnomethodological claims to an understanding of how (and how complexly) understandings can move from one situation to another: through conceptual frameworks. By organizing facts, beliefs, ideas, and experiences into conceptual schemata, people can more easily access the situational knowledge needed to be successful in an interaction. Interactions are internalized, then, as part of a complex conceptual scheme.

The internalization of concepts can take place across distantiated (in time and space) situations. Bazerman (1994d), for example, identifies how chains of situations may keep a concept addressed in one situation at or near the front of one’s mind across multiple situations, with each shift in situations leading toward, eventually, a more deepened understanding of the concept. The internal activity around a concept “is integrated with [an actor’s] external symbolic behavior and the symbols that behavior employs or responds to” (p. 154). The internalization of a concept has externalized consequences in the interaction of a person-in-activity with others and the surrounding environment.

Understanding interactional realities as internalized through conceptual schemata helps us make clear the connections between the phenomenological and ethnomethodological

understandings of the world and the activity system approach to social order that informs some of the literature below. Conceptual schemata both allow for the reinforcement of reality through a carryover of intention and indexicality across situations and, because of the plasticity of conceptual schemata, underscore the very limitations, fragility, and permeability of that reality.

### **Laminations, Sponsors, and Sponsorshaping**

The acts of sense-making that human beings relentlessly engage in are (1) situational in nature and (2) historically oriented. People perceive events as occurring within bounded situations that are, themselves, chained together by experience. The conceptual schemata that people have of language and tools are organized to allow for people to deploy talk and tools in situations in order to accomplish their goals. However, people often index multiple objects and actors in a given situation at different times and for different purposes. The layered nature of this kind of sense-making is what Prior (1998) refers to as “lamination.” Drawing from the work of Leont’ev and Vygotsky, Prior argues that all activities that people engage in are laminated within other activities in any given situation; that is, activity is copresent, and talk, tools, and texts are aligned in different ways as different activities are attended to with different levels of attention. Prior refers to these as overlapping “streams” of activities.

In any given situation, people have to organize, or orchestrate, these activities in order to accomplish their aimed-for social goals. Someone talking on a cell phone must hold the conversation, navigate the space within which they are speaking, control the tone and volume of voice, and engage in some environmental structuring practices (Prior & Shipka, 2003) in order to complete the phone call successfully. I refer to this as an act of *orchestration*, which

is more than simply an organization of materials. The available materials (room, phone, objects in the room, voice) are organized *with* one another in order to accomplish a given goal, with the conversation being the leading object in that given orchestration.

In order to engage in sense-making, then, people orchestrate the laminated activities of their given situational environments (as present through talk, tools, and text) toward a given goal. This understanding carries with it the implicit acceptance of the boundaries of a “situation,” which are defined by the actors in that situation: how they structure their understanding of their world in a given interaction constitutes the situation, even if co-actors define their situations in slightly different ways. For example, a role player in a given football game might regard, say, a punt, very differently than his coach, who would be considering the actions of that play within the larger context of the series, quarter, half, or game. This conscious attention to the surrounding world, as well as the individual historical expectations of those surroundings, establishes the situation for a given actor. The language, actions, and tool use of a given actor can indicate how the individual is bounding his or her situation.

But if conceptual schemata helps people make sense of situations based on their individuated historical experiences, and if each situation (as determined by the conscious understandings of a person within that situation) requires with it an orchestration of multiple streams of activity, what is it that allows each situation in the situational chain that makes up the lives of people to connect with those of the past? What prevents a massive break between one given situation and another, and enables past situational understandings to be continually redeployed in new situations? To answer this, we need to look again toward the flat, materially uneven social world that Latour (2005) explores in his own work.

A flat social world makes every place a locality, turns powerful, distant social forces into nothing more than other localities with more (and more deeply grooved) connections. In these localities, and through these connections, people conceive of and use writing in different ways. Brandt and Clinton (2002) expand on this idea by treating literacy as an autonomous object, a tool that is transformed and remediated across time and space as it travels from locality to locality. But, through Giddens (1984), we can see that these transformations are caught up in historically situated understandings, beliefs, and routines of people in those locations, which are themselves caught up in other historically situated realities (which are, in part, organized by conceptual schemata).

Understanding the social world as both flat and uneven—composed of multiple localities that are connected through objects (including texts) to other localities, with some sites having more (and more enduring) connections than others—explains a great deal about the limits and possibilities that different people see in different acts of writing. When we write, we construct objects that are meant to reach out across both times and distances—as Bazerman (2013) claims, writing is a social act that occurs at a distance, that carries ideas in one location to ideas in another location through established systems of communication. Tools for written communication are all around us in any given situation, and these tools allow us to create connections through alphanumeric texts to a greater or lesser number of other localities.

But these connections do not exist free of charge, and this charge points out the sometimes-hidden political or economic cost of acts of literacy. Using a connection between one locality and another has a cost, and that cost comes in the form of alphanumeric text that the connection permits. Locations of writing project themselves into other locations only for

a price: learning to write in accordance with certain social forces (i.e., the church, school) leads to certain understandings and purposes for writing that, at the same time, eliminates other understandings and purposes. The “payment” of aligning with one location brings with it the future payments of seeing acts of writing in certain ways and for certain purposes. Brandt (2001) has referred to this cost as “sponsoring” and has argued that those conduits that carry writing and the ability to write across situations are “sponsors of literacy,” enabling certain kinds of writing and constraining others in a larger or smaller amount of locations. By turning to the concept of “sponsors of literacy” and my attached concept, “sponsorshaping,” we can see how the flat yet uneven view of the social world appears to writers firsthand, as well as the possibilities for transformation that individual writing agents see themselves as having in a given writing situation.

**Sponsors of literacy and sponsorshaping.** Brandt (1998) defines “sponsors of literacy” as “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way” (p. 166). Sponsors of literacy are ever-present throughout our lives, giving rise not only to the alphanumeric opportunities before us but what we see of those opportunities. Sponsors of literacy mold our reading and writing actions into specific, sociohistorically situated forms through which we come to understand reading and writing.

Sponsors of literacy are also economically situated. That is, the positions people hold in society influences, via sponsors of literacy, the kinds of literacy that are made available to them. It is in this way that history shapes the connections among localities that Latour (2005) mentions: people in certain locations have certain reading and writing opportunities made available to them because of the actions of past users of alphanumeric texts in similar

past localities, as well as the actions of those in distantiated localities in attempting (or failing to attempt to) contact with another location. Consider, for example, the case of Raymond Branch, one of Brandt's (1998) research subjects. Branch was the son of a professor and a real estate executive, and his experiences with literate activity emerged out of the worlds within which his parents lived:

He recalled that his first grade classroom in 1975 was hooked up to a mainframe computer at Stanford University and that, as a youngster, he enjoyed fooling around with computer programming in the company of "real users" at his father's science lab. This process was not interrupted much when, in the late 1970s, his family moved to the Midwest. Raymond received his first personal computer as a Christmas present from his parents when he was twelve years old, and a modem the year after that (Brandt, 1998, p. 170).

Branch's early life was lived within range of certain kinds of computer-based literacy, something enabled by the literate action of his parents through the course of their lives and careers as well as the attempts of localities like Stanford University to reach across to other localities that he happened to be in. Furthermore, the texts and people in the situations he encountered (i.e., the "real users" at his father's computer lab, or the directions for a personal computer) shaped the way he understood and made sense of those literacy opportunities.

In her work, Brandt (2001) traces the influence of social and economic forces on writers from different ages throughout the twentieth century. She does this through a series of interviews. While we are not able to see the nuanced influence on specific literate acts through this research method, we are able to see the impact of various literacy sponsorships and the perceptions of those sponsorships as interviewees described their literacy practices

retrospectively. This indicates the historic nature of the influence of sponsorships: they influence literacy not just in a moment, but become a resource for writers in future moments of interaction with writing.

Sponsors of literacy, then, are local, mediated agents that project themselves into other, sometimes very distant localities. We see sponsors of literacy enacted in our everyday lives because they allow us to perform certain kinds of literate activity, carrying with them—as we established earlier—certain costs for their use. But sponsors of literacy are always experienced firsthand, as distant intrusions into local situations, wherever “local” might be. Sponsors of literacy are what distantly connected and extensively mediated locations of literate activity directors appear to be at any given location.

When a sponsor of literacy does appear within a local situation, however, the sponsor only carries with it commitments to a certain extent. A sponsor of literacy does not demand, for example, obedience with every stroke of the pen in order to function as a sponsor. The College Board, for instance, serves as a sponsor of specific kinds of literacy by offering AP tests and providing course material to prepare students for those tests. However, the College Board does not provide a specific course sequence, demand certain lesson plan, or order certain kinds of assignments for each and every AP course offered throughout the country. There are limits to the demands of sponsorship, and it is at these boundaries that local agents can take over sponsors of literacy to engage in literate activity aimed at accomplishing immediate, situationally specific goals.

I have termed the act of manipulating literacy sponsors “sponsorshaping.” Sponsorshaping occurs when multiple sponsors of literacy are orchestrated by a local agent in order to engage in literate activity. The orchestrations of these sponsors, to an extent, meet

the demands of sponsors of literacy while still leaving room for individual agents in local circumstances to solve problems. Sponsorshaping acknowledges both the obedience demanded of the deeply grooved pathways of powerful sponsors of literacy and the tactical freedom that any agent in any situation possesses.

A sponsor of literacy is always a distant locality projecting itself through material force into another locality, and sponsorshaping acts are always moves by agents in a given locality manipulating multiple sponsors of literacy in order to accomplish goals. Since a great deal of the literature on sponsors of literacy also involves local agents acting as literacy sponsors, the terms can become somewhat problematic under certain circumstances, but suffice to say that sponsors of literacy must, when entering a locality, be shaped by their local representatives.

Sponsorshaping as a concept allows us to see how sponsors of literacy fare when they enter different localities. This is of particular importance to the study of writing because writing—as a partially private, distant social act (Bazerman, 1994a; 2013)—can shape many different sponsors in many different ways en route to creating a text to be sent out into the world. A teacher constructing a writing assignment, for example, may organize state standards, available writing tools in the classroom, and the progression of the course curriculum to make a clear assignment for her students. Just as sponsors of literacy only appear as sponsors of literacy to a distant locality, so too can we only see sponsorshaping acts in the influence of local agents on the products of distant localities.

**Literate action in a flat, uneven writing world.** Considering all action as occurring within localities that have a varying number of varying smoothed pathways—i.e., routes carrying the writing of one locality to another with greater or lesser friction, hostility,



uncertainty, or tension—to other localities creates a flat yet uneven social world within which writing can flourish. That is, while all human activity occurs within localities, some localities are capable of projecting their power further than others based on the historically-based clusters of connections linking them to other localities. For example, a school board meeting may make decisions (and create texts about those decisions) that are carried to the schools in its district via historically-established routes of communications: formal memos to principals, emails to individual teachers, and notices to the community at large on a district web site. A teacher in a classroom, on the other hand, does not have those kinds of connections, and if she were to attempt to follow them out, strong resistance from other localities (i.e., anger by the principal, dismissal by parents and guardians, and perhaps a ban from the district site by the webmaster) may follow. A memo to principals from the school board is historically-situated, and therefore “smoother,” than a memo to principles from a classroom teacher. In essence, any person doing anything is a person in a locality (making the social world flat—we are all in different localities), and the historical significance of that location influences the connections by which actions in that locality can influence actions in other localities (thus the unevenness of locations based on their history).

Any literate person can engage in text construction in any given situation, although the connections of one situation to another—and of the mutual construction of power in that situation—will influence the localities to which the text will travel. A teacher, for example, may create in a given classroom situation notes on a whiteboard. These notes will be written down by many students, will be turned into test questions, and may even be part of a published teacher practice article in the future. The teacher in the situation of the lesson, then, has quite a few avenues into which her work will flow. However, two students passing notes

back and forth—who are constructing different aspects of their identities and making different uses of their available tools—have very few avenues into which their work can flow. While they do take advantage of the tools and locality available to them in the situation, their text will likely not go far beyond one another and perhaps other friends with whom they would like to share the note. Should the teacher catch them at the act, their note would travel further (i.e., to the principal's office or a phone call home), but this is hardly the kind of traveling that the authors of the note want.

The differences between the teacher writing the note on the board and the students writing notes to one another on slips of paper is an example of people in similar places, at similar times, working with similar tools, engaging with text for different purposes based on different sociohistorical positions. The teacher, because of the deeply grooved connections in the activity system that supports and reproduces the grammar of schooling, is set in a position of authority in the classroom, and thus has access to a greater range of tools than the students. Obviously, this is not necessarily a preconceived notion: rather, students and teachers work together to create, again and again, a context within which the teacher maintains authority. Of course, the access to resources that the teacher possesses, from control of the classroom setup to access to the principal and detention write-ups, makes it much easier for teacher-class relationships to fall within that authority during interactions.

As established earlier, people bring with them to new situations the full weight of past experience and identity (Schutz, 1967) and they do so through their own conceptions of reality and organizations of activity (Mehan & Wood, 1975; Peyrot, 1982). Encounters with new situations leads people to assess, at the level of conscious attention, or meso level (Spinuzzi, 2005), the kinds of actions they need to complete in order to successfully

accomplish their goals. As they construct meaning, they draw off of the smoothed pathways of connections among other localities to help them make sense of their world and their work. It is this flatness that enables such a wide variety of writing: for people, the string of contextualized situations experienced at the meso level and connected through activity systems, genre sets and systems, experience, and intertextuality does not end. Writers (and people, in general) are always already in a situation, always performing actions within events, and it is within that situation that writing always occurs.

### **The Possibilities of Activity Theory and Pragmatism**

The theories of ethnomethodology and phenomenology presented above take a close look at short moments of activity: during the interactions amongst people in specific situations. In both theories, these small interactions lead to the larger propagation and remediation of the social world within which the interactions take part, but they do not easily work up to a full picture of the larger social system of which any given social act is part. To make clearer that aspect, this section presents activity theory, its roots and its intentions, and its many, practical connections to ethnomethodology.

Activity theory, which sees people as active agents in social, historical, and economic systems and attempts to understand those systems by tracing the actions of those people, has its roots in Marxist philosophy. Most importantly for the purposes of this research, the theory is situated on Marxist concepts of ideologies, or the tenet that understandings of the world spring not from the natural facts of its existence but from the means of controlling that natural existence that have developed over time. For Marx, control of production meant control of the view of how the world works. While later activity theory is vague on the

connection of ideology to the means of production, the understanding that the world as we perceive it is mediated by historically situated understandings remains.

Leont'ev (1978) describes the separation of Marxist understandings of psychology from pre-Marxist understandings of psychology as follows: "Let us remember the famous theses of Karl Marx about Feuerbach, which state that the main inadequacy of former metaphysical materialism was that it considered sensitivity only in the form of contemplation, and not as human activity or practice; in contrast to materialism, idealism understood activity abstractly, and not as actual sensory activity of man" (p. 45). Leont'ev, launching what Engestrom (2001) would refer to as first-generation Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, considered psychology not just situated in the person but in the person-in-action: in other words, as established above, personhood is identified in situated activity. This aligns with Bloome, et al's (2005) notion of event in that the actors both construct and are constructed by the situation, but differs in an important way: in his attempt to describe the activity of humanity, Leont'ev attempts to shape understandings of both the minute, barely-attended-to activities of people as well as the larger systems of which they are a part. "In all of its distinctiveness," writes Leont'ev, "the activity of the human individual represents a system included in the system of relationships of society. Outside these relationships human activity simply does not exist" (p. 51). Within these activity systems, people engage in different actions, the goal-directed work of individuals. People accomplish those actions through operations, or the direct response to the conditions and tools available to accomplish the action. This three-level examination of activity both highlights the interconnected nature of human action and situates that interconnected action within a developing history.

Leont'ev's separation of human activity into activity, action, and operation was expanded upon by the later work of Engestrom (2000a), Prior (1998), and Spinuzzi (2005; 2012) among many others. Engestrom's work in health clinics pointed out the overlapping existence of activity systems: people do not deal with one activity at a system at a time, but with what Prior (1998) would show to be laminated systems of activity. These activities sometimes contradicted one another, an issue that could be resolved with a careful activity system analysis (and a response to that analysis by management teams). Spinuzzi expanded Engestrom's work into other business fields, and his analysis of these situations led to a re-consideration of levels of activity. Rather than activity, action, and operation, Spinuzzi (2000) discusses the macro, meso, and micro levels of activity. Of these three levels, Spinuzzi (2012) considers the meso level to be the conscious level—the level of goal-oriented work. The macro level, which contains the larger systems of which people are part when they act, remains largely unconscious, as well as the micro-level activity of habituated movement. Both of these levels (obviously) can be brought to the level of conscious awareness, but in the day-to-day activity of the sites of investigation that Spinuzzi works within, these levels are not consciously attended to.

This concept of activity systems provides a wider view of the individual activity that was accounted for through ethnomethodological means. However, people encounter these multiple, overlapping activity systems only in the situations that they encounter. That is, people cannot step outside of an activity system to see what the entire system looks like, and locate their place in it, as one can on a map. Rather, people make sense of an activity system based on the situations that they encounter within it, largely at the meso level of activity as they take into account unconsciously the presence of micro and macro elements. Though

ethnomethodology can highlight how individuals in a given conversation make sense of their worlds together, the work of activity theory can bring those interactions into alignment with other, more distant localities in order to establish systems of activity that people are engaged in. But, as activity theory (and the work of Mehan & Wood (1975)) indicates, any given situation brings with it complex historical components from both institutions and individuals. The interactions that people have with the tools, talk, text, and people of these activity systems become part of their history of experience, and therefore become resources for them to draw from in understanding future interactions.

To understand how people make sense of their past experiences in situations and draw upon it for future situations will require a blend of activity theory research and work done in American Pragmatism. Vygotsky (1978) carefully traced the development of concepts in the development of individuals over time from vague, syncretic heaps into transportable, abstract understandings that could be applied in multiple situations. This kind of agentic activity of abstraction allowed Vygotsky to walk the line between two strains of psychology that existed at the time: Gestalt understandings of the world and elementary sensations. What Vygotsky described was both a gradual abstraction and what could be called a gradual unfolding of material situations: as people come to more deeply interact with their environments, they come to break those environments up into different parts based on the goals that they are working toward.

The calling up of past experience to resolve present circumstances is brought up by Leont'ev (1978), and Vygotsky (1986), but it is described in considerably more depth by the work of James (1892). Although working from different theoretical positions than activity theorists—indeed, Pragmatists attempted an ideologically neutral position—a great deal of

James' views on experience and consciousness overlap with the activity-centered theories discussed above. James (1892) argues that thoughts are all interconnected, and that each thought informs future thoughts in a continually moving consciousness: "What I wish to lay stress on is this, that *no state once gone can recur and be identical with what it was before*" (p. 173, emphasis in original). Thoughts do not exist independently but occur within a constantly changing, constantly connected stream. Though people may encounter similar (or the same) objects at multiple times, each encounter with a given object occurs with a different state of mind, a consciousness that is now different in some way due to the experiences that occurred between each encounter.

James is able to take an individual perspective on the historical situation of consciousness that Leont'ev (1978) outlines well. He argues that "consciousness is not a manifestation of some kind of mystical capability of the human brain to generate a "light of consciousness" under the influence of things impinging upon it – stimuli – but a product of those special – that is, social – relations into which people enter and which are realized only by means of their brains, their organs of feeling, and their organs of action" (p. 19).

Consciousness is generated by individually interpreted social understandings of the world, and James is able to show how individual consciousness arises within those socially established understandings, is shaped by and shapes the social world around it, and engages in a continual change of states as it encounters various phenomena: "Now we are seeing, now hearing; now reasoning, now willing; now recollecting, now expecting; now loving, now hating; and in a hundred other ways we know our minds to be alternately engaged" (p. 173). Throughout all of these changes of states, people are selectively attending to their environment: "The phenomena of selective attention and of deliberative will are of course

patent examples of this choosing activity. But few of us are aware how incessantly it is at work in operations not ordinarily called by these names. Accentuation and Emphasis are present in every perception we have” (p. 187). Erickson and Schultz’s (1997) formulation, that people act as contexts for one another, indexing elements of the surrounding environment for social use, can help describe how this selection and attention happens, and the activity systems and actions with which people are involved—the macro and meso levels of activity—can both explain why people index certain situational elements as well as indicate how different situations fit together.

The selection of what elements in the world to attend to individuates each human being, and “in a world of objects thus individualized by our mind’s selective industry, what is called our ‘experience’ is almost entirely determined by our habits of attention” (James, 1892, p. 188). James (1890) expands on this idea slightly further by arguing that “*Experience means experience of something foreign supposed to impress us, whether spontaneously or in consequence of our own exertions and acts*” (p. 619, emphasis in original). James acknowledges in a vague way the social ties to this selection—“The race as a whole largely agrees as to what it shall notice and name; and among the noticed parts we select in much the same way for accentuation and preference, or subordination and dislike” (p. 190)—but remains tied to the idea that individuals within their own conscious experience still need to make their own choices, even if those choices do fall in line with the multitude of others. These choices, as he points out, influence other choices in an unfolding history of decision-making and experience interaction: “In these ways experiences moulds us every hour, and makes our minds a mirror of the time- and space-connections between the things in the world” (p. 619).



It is in this selection of attention that students experience school—and the experience of school that continues to shape the selection of attention. Students come to expect to see, hear, do, and otherwise attend to certain things that count as “school,” and it is through the new experiences supplied by school that students begin to learn to attend to different things. As students develop the habit of school, they come to expect to enter and exit classrooms at a bell, attend to different subjects at different times of day, and complete certain kinds of activities in order to count as a participative member of class. Furthermore, while they are doing this, they are learning new facts that will lead them to understand one aspect of the world differently while, at the same time, underscoring, reproducing, and supporting the structure of schooling.

The work of Mehan and Wood (1975a; 1975b) and Garfinkel (1967) adds to the situational understanding of the continually unfolding set of situational experiences that students bring with them to the classroom. Activity theory has situated those experiences—as well as the classroom itself—within large and small activities of which the participants of the study may not be clearly aware. Finally, Pragmatist thought allows for this theoretical position to highlight the individual experience of the classroom culture, activity system, actions, and operations. However, each of these theories are not in use simply because they complement one another well: rather, every theory invoked above has its roots in how people make sense of the world around them. Each theory pushes out in a slightly different direction than the others when discussing this sense-making, and, when aligned, these theories work together to not just how people make sense of the world but how that sense-making contributes to the re-media-tion and reproduction of society. Furthermore, these theories, together, indicate the possibility of “literate acts,” or a theoretically and

methodologically possible frame of investigation into the moment-to-moment literate activity of research subjects.

### **Literate Acts: A Theoretical Frame and Pillar of Methodological Decision-making**

If human activity is both structured by distant, powerful social forces and a shaping agent in the local implementation of those forces, then the use of alphanumeric text, by extension, would also be so structured and structured. Texts, being a human creation, not only beget structure but are structured in and of themselves. The act of constructing text is likewise both structured and structured. It happens in times and places (chronotopes – Prior & Shipka, 2003) both selected by and selected for the writer. Within these chronotopes, writers put words on pages in a series of connected, organized literate acts.

If the idea of literate acts was bound, then, it would be defined as an alignment of activity, environment, experience, and society toward the creation of alphanumeric texts in accordance with available sponsors of literacy. This definition focuses attention on the specific construction of messages through the use of symbols. But literate acts involve more than the rearrangement of symbols. Being an *act*, a literate act incorporates the wide range of experience that is present in every construction of a text (written or spoken). People perform literate acts by aligning (Prior, 1998) activity, environment, experience, and society toward a given, conscious (i.e., meso-level) goal. Decisions about specific literate act performances are made by drawing off of an understanding of current circumstances as well as past experiences that have led to success in similar circumstances in a tactical response to the unique situations at hand. In essence, a literate act reproduces at the local level a re-mediated social situation to the extent that other, concurrent situations will permit (i.e., “no more than the social order will allow” – Bazerman, 1994b, p. 226).

Literate acts occur, like all conscious acts, at the meso level. However, in order for a literate act to be even be moderately successful, alignment must be present among all three levels. Sufficiently habituated micro-level activities must be in smooth working order in order to free executive functioning for meso-level activity. Furthermore, the meso-level activity that occurs must be in position within a larger system of activity to “count” as participation, learning, success, etc. for the person performing the literate act.

I draw the term “experience” from the work of Dewey, who held in high esteem the importance of drawing off of past experience in order to make decisions in the present and future. Dewey’s concept also has parallels with the work of Schutz (1967), although Schutz did not assign the kind of weight to the present moment that Dewey did. For Dewey, the past and the present were mutually influential, with present activities reshaping past experience and making them new again in some way to help solve a problem at hand and, possibly, future similar problems. Schutz, while not arguing against this kind of event, showed the interaction of past and present to be more one-way, with the past driving the immediate moment. I lean on the more equal back-and-forth that Dewey emphasized while, at the same time, acknowledging the similarities with Schutz as well as his work to connect individual experiential considerations with larger understandings of how society worked.

People bring with them to each meso-level activity the entirety of their past experience. Our past events do not go floating off into the ether when we encounter new events, but rather stay with us, waiting to be called upon in order to shape our action. Our memories of experiences past have the weight of full experience, even if those memories are not entirely accurate. But, regardless of their accuracy, it is largely through our experiences that we pull together decisions for action in new situations. When encountering a meso-level

issue in a given situation, we rely on our knowledge of past experiences within the same or a similar system of activities, as well as the bedrock of our habituated activities, to deal with that issue.

The social interactions of our world affect who we are, what we become, and why we do what we do, to a large extent. In order for a literate act to be successful, it must be used in a way that aligns in some way with how society operates and understands the rest of the world to operate. But society is an ever-changing phenomenon experienced from billions of different points of view. The society of one person is never entirely the society of another. People are inducted into society from birth and grow to understand those societies as they grow to understand themselves. We grow up, then, in a world made by us and others for us and others—and so the literate acts we perform are performed not just *for* others, but *with* and *through* others.

Aligning activity, experience, environment, and society is an extremely difficult task for writing, even though it no doubt happens every day, sometimes without warning or explanation. However, instead of understanding that literate acts occur and that these many small literate performances can add up over time into something meaningful in the life of the student, researchers need to find ways to identify these acts and trace them over time to see whether and how they shape the development of the student.

But the activity, experience, environment, and society must align with more than just one another: they must also align with available sponsors of literacy so that the alignment can create alphanumeric texts that count in other social situations. This alignment is, paradoxically, both precarious and resilient: the balance of a given alignment of activity, experience, environment, and society can easily be thrown off, but these off-thrown elements

may then coalesce into another literate act under the demands of a different sponsor of literacy. Furthermore, sponsors of literacy have limits to their power, tolerances that are permitted, and negotiations that may occur along the way toward constructing a literate act. The powers of sponsors of literacy only reach so far, making each literate act constructed a series of tactical decisions that can reshape or reframe local understandings of a sponsor. This is not to say that individuals in localities have endless options, of course. Rather, sponsors of literacy carry with them a certain latitude within which local actors may work. Beyond that, however, tensions arise—the expectations of others, the completion of tasks, and the mutual, intersubjective understandings around a given activity may be threatened should an actor in a given location work too radically contrary to the pressures of sponsors of literacy.

People perform literate acts within larger activity situations that they experience through their own streams of experience, and these literate acts connect together within chronotopically laminated chains (Prior & Shipka, 2003). A literate act does not stand alone but carries across situations and activities over both long and short periods of time. The aforementioned three levels of activity (micro, meso, macro), then, are interspersed with many other, sometimes competing levels of activity.

This project uses the term “literate act,”—a concept within a sociocultural, historical, and material framework—as a unit of analysis, something that hones in on the complex alignment of activity, experience, environment, and society not just theoretically, but empirically. In this study, literate acts have boundaries, specific beginnings and endings, and it is within those boundaries that literate performances can be examined richly. However, the bounding of literate acts will be performed in chapter four.

## **Transforming Theoretical Framing into Methodological Action**

Relying on ethnomethodological assumptions of how people construct their realities (Mehan and Garfinkel), pragmatic issues of attention (James and Dewey), sociocultural and sociohistorical understandings of how consciousness evolves, is maintained, and is social in nature (Marx, Vygotsky, Leont'ev, Bazerman, Prior), and sociological notions about the interconnectedness and flatness of the social world (Latour) leads to a nuanced and complex understanding of how classrooms operate. Committing the classroom and actions within it to such a complex view of how the world operates that the seemingly unitary nature of classroom elements fragment, disperse, and become lodged in messy, intertwining activities of mutually constitutive and influential systems of activity and understandings about the world. However, it is through this theoretical approach only that we can successfully address the research questions for this project in ways that will inform both teacher actions and educational research. Opening up the world of interaction in this light brings forward many opportunities for examining the subtle nuances of which our daily classroom lives consist.

The above theoretical framework has re-framed the findings in current research on the writing development of students by arguing that human activity is situational, historical, ongoing, and geared toward the constant re-production of fragile, permeable realities through culturally situated interactions. Within a given situation, people orchestrate a great deal of laminated activity streams in order to accomplish their goals. Knowledge about what to do in a given situation carries forward from the past through conceptual schemata, which people are able to use across chains of situations due to the uneven flatness of the social world.

This theoretical position, based in work on phenomenology, ethnomethodology, Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, and Actor-Network Theory, calls for a very specific

kind of methodology, one that both allows for the examination of the social realities of subjects while, at the same time, reflexively calling into question the position of the researcher conducting these forays into the interactionally-constructed realities of students and teachers. In terms of practical, methodological application, this theoretical framework calls for (1) treating people as people-in-activity; (2) treating individuated understandings as contingent upon situation and established in social interaction; and (3) treating those individuated understandings as avenues through which the social order of the classroom is pushed forward in time. In order to address each of these treatments, a methodological framework that accounts for the independent views of individual students while also showing how those independent views are interactively achieved is needed. Furthermore, the methods need to show how these interactive, independent achievements are part and parcel of the larger systems of activities that support and are supported by them.

In the chapter three, I lay out a methodology that informs the theoretical framework discussed above. At the heart of this methodology is what Saldana (2009) refers to as “grounded theory.” While this methodological approach has its roots in American pragmatism (particularly, Dewey), the implications of the theory, as well as some subsequent expansions of the approach, make it a valuable starting point a methodology that meets the demands of this theoretical framework. It allows for a clear separation and analysis of various realities, and provides options for bringing those realities together in a clear, coherent manner. Furthermore, the collection of open and axial codes that result from grounded theory analysis make for a more effective tracking of influences across flat social landscapes and make connections across realities easier to trace across situations and over time.

### **Chapter Three: Subjects, Setting, and Coding**

In the methodology below, I use a grounded theory approach to (1) respect the realities of my research subjects and (2) put those realities in dialogue with my own incorrigible propositions and assumptions about how the world operates. Grounded theory, as I show below, helps me ferret out the realities that are being enacted in front of me while, at the same time, allowing me to connect those realities with one another and current literature on how students' writing activity develops. However, I also take steps away, at times, from traditional grounded theory approaches in order to more efficiently analyze the complex implications that my findings have on the teaching and learning of writing both in middle school classrooms and overall. Both the grounded theory approach and further analysis are addressed below.

The following chapter presents my site, participants, and coding approach, connects that approach to the theoretical framework in the prior chapter, and connects both to the specificities of the research site within which I am working. Though the research site, theoretical framework, and methodological choices have each informed one another throughout the process of my research, I hope to show, clearly, how the research site is particularly appropriate for addressing the research questions addressed in chapter one.

#### **The Theory-Practice Link**

This study approaches its records through the application of grounded theory, which is discussed in some detail below. This methodological choice was informed by the theoretical rationale proposed in chapter two. The connections between grounded theory and my theoretical framework above are linked perhaps most strongly by the influence of American Pragmatism on each, since it is at the heart of the development of grounded theory



(Corbin & Strauss, 2008). However, there are also some further connections among grounded theory and the ethnomethodological, sociological, and phenomenological findings that I have discussed.

Each of the theories contributing to my own framework takes into careful account the role of individual sense-making in the construction of reality. This tendency toward individuated situativity helps this project understand not just the activities of the individuals being studied but the position of the researcher as well. It is possible, through grounded theory, to identify and work with both the understandings of the research subjects and the understandings of the researcher himself.

### **A Grounded Theory Approach**

Using grounded theory in writing research is, in and of itself, nothing new. Farkas and Haas (2012), in fact, present a grounded theory approach specifically for studying writing and literacy in Powell and Takayoshi's *Practicing Research in Writing Studies*, one of several recent works to explore methodological decision-making in writing studies research. Positing that "the goal of the grounded theory approach is a theory ("a vision") that is grounded to that "somewhere particular": data from a specific area of human practice" (p. 81). For Farkas and Haas, this "specific area" "is literacy as it is practiced in complex cultural sites" (p. 81). They outline, generally, the structure that grounded theory has taken since its inception: "Grounded theory might best be understood as a set of explicit, iterative strategies primarily based on the act of comparison; in fact, grounded theory often is called "the constant comparison method"" (p. 82). The constant comparison of different codes, categories, and core categories to both one another and the data points that they interpret

creates a clear connection to the available data that, while not replicable in the traditional sense, can still be taken up by other researchers entering the project.

Farkas and Haas (2012) present two movements and four phases in their approach to grounded theory, which can be seen in table 3.1. These movements highlight the iterative, recursive nature of grounded theory and the interactive nature of each movement and phase.

**Table 3.1: Farkas and Haas (2012) Movements, Phases, and Activities in Grounded Theory**

Movement 1: Pushing out / undoing / fracturing Phase 1: Open coding Phase 2: Dimensionalizing Recurrent Activities: Constant Comparison, Memo Writing
Movement 2: Pulling in / redoing / building theory Phase 3: Selective coding Phase 4: Integration (via induction or theoretical sensitivity) Recurrent Activities: Mapping, Memo Writing

These movements, phases, and activities lead to the construction of a grounded theory (with a “lower case ‘t’”) that provides an explanation for a particular phenomenon in a particular place.

The connection to data and replicability of grounded theory, to Farkas and Haas, solves three dilemmas in qualitative research: the data dilemma (the tendency of qualitative researchers to gather massive amounts of unwieldy data); the theory dilemma (the mismatch between what a researcher would expect to find according to a theory and what a researcher would actually find) and the viewpoint dilemma (deciding between a researcher’s point of view and a participant’s point of view).

Due to my theoretical framework and the nature of my research questions, grounded theory proved to be a very valuable method in my research approach. Through it, I was able to create a streamlined series of research decisions reaching from my research questions to my findings. The key methodological commitment for my purposes is Saldana’s (2009)

description of grounded theory. Saldana's (2009) positions draw heavily from Charmaz (2004) as well as Corbin & Strauss (2008). Saldana (2009) draws the detail of these authors' positions out and sets them in dialogue with other methods of acquiring the needed information. I relied on Saldana's methods of initial and axial coding for my use of grounded theory.

Corbin and Strauss (2008) define grounded theory as "a specific methodology developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) for the purpose of building theory from data" (l. 218). They use grounded theory as a "way of thinking about and studying social phenomena" (l. 218) and base their approach philosophically on the work of Dewey and Mead. In particular, these authors were concerned about the nature of truth in research. Drawing from the American pragmatists, they argue that "what is discovered about "reality" cannot be divorced from the operative perspective of the knower, which enters silently into his or her search for, and ultimate conclusions about, some event" (l. 271). The authors are careful to point out that this approach does not lead to "radical relativism" but rather, due to its assumptions that (1) truth is based on limited knowledge at a given moment of time and (2) the collection of knowledge over time is not an illusion, an appreciation for the situational and historical practicality of truth as we know it.

The idea of practicality is what most effectively links the ideas of grounded theory to the theoretical framework discussed above. Grounded theory builds off of Dewey's (1929) claim that "Our discussion has for the most part turned upon an analysis of knowledge. The theme, however, is the relation of knowledge and action; the final import of the conclusions as to knowledge resides in the changed idea it enforces into action" (p. 245). Dewey links theory and practice here, as does grounded theory. In grounded theory, the creation of

everyday understandings of life is not separate from the theoretical underpinnings of our activity or our conceptions of truth. This echoes powerfully not only with the pragmatic aspects of the theoretical framework but also with its ethnomethodological aspects, since collaborators build a tenuous and permeable sense of reality on an ongoing basis.

Another connection between grounded theory and the theoretical framework above is the importance of social activity and social interaction in the building of theory. As Corbin and Strauss (2008) note, some of the assumptions of grounded theory “are shared by other methodologies of social research” (l. 290). In particular, the assumptions of the social nature of reality are shared by both ethnomethodology and, in part, research into activity theory (although much of the work on activity theory that takes the social nature of reality into account is left without emphasis in the work). In order to clarify their own position and separate their theoretical framing from the frameworks of others, Corbin and Strauss (2008) list sixteen assumptions that their framework builds from. These assumptions also provide a strong link between the theoretical framework above and the methodological decisions below.

**Table 3.2: Assumptions of Corbin and Strauss (2008)**

Assumption 1	The external world is a symbolic representation
Assumption 2	Meanings (symbols) are aspects of interaction, and are related to others within systems of meanings (symbols).
Assumption 3	Actions are embedded in interactions—past, present and imagined future.
Assumption 4	Contingencies are likely to arise during a course of action. These can bring about change in its duration, pace, and even intent, which may alter the structure and process of interaction.
Assumption 5	Actions are accompanied by temporality, for they constitute courses of action of varying duration.
Assumption 6	Courses of interaction arise out of shared perspectives, and when not shared, if action/interaction is to proceed, perspectives must be negotiated (Blumer, 1969).

Assumption 7	During early childhood and continuing all through life, humans develop selves that enter into virtually all their actions and in a variety of ways (Mead, 1959).
Assumption 8	Actions (overt and covert) may be preceded, accompanied, and/or succeeded by reflective interactions (feeding back onto each other).
Assumption 9	Interactions may be followed by reviews of actions, one's own and those of others, as well as projections of future ones.
Assumption 10	Actions are not necessarily rational.
Assumption 11	Action has emotional aspects: To conceive of emotion as distinguishable from action, as entities accompanying action, is to reify those aspects of action.
Assumption 12	Means-ends analytic schemes are usually not appropriate to understanding action and interaction.
Assumption 13	The embeddedness in interaction of an action implies an intersection of actions.
Assumption 14	The several or many participants in an interactional course necessitate the "alignment" (or articulation) of their respective actions (Blumer, 1969).
Assumption 15	A major set of conditions for actors' perspectives, and thus their interactions, is their memberships in social worlds and subworlds.
Assumption 16	A useful fundamental distinction between classes or interactions is between the routine and the problematic (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, l. 328-349).

These assumptions carry with them a great many connections between the theoretical framework and grounded theory, although my theoretical framework expands beyond them in some considerable ways. However, the assumptions align clearly enough to my own theoretical framework to make the connection between it and grounded theory clear, relevant, and effective for analysis. The power of symbols, the embeddedness of interactions, the temporal, contingent, and perspectival nature of those interactions, the historical nature and

reflexivity of activity, and the social grounding of understanding the world all links to the theoretical framework established in the previous chapter.

The application of GT to my own set of data began with coding. Saldana (2009) describes codes as “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for the portion of language-based or visual data” (l. 229). I found the idea of coding to be very valuable due to the large number of different texts that I had to work with. Furthermore, coding allowed me to indicate the different understandings of various actors in a given situation (myself included) without, at any point, considering a single view as a universal given. In particular, Saldana’s definitions of initial and axial codes were particularly helpful in allowing me to describe and align what was occurring in the classroom, during interaction, and both within and across texts. Saldana’s approach enabled me to coordinate individual interactions in order to recreate mutually-agreed-upon understandings from my available records.

Saldana borrows the term “initial coding” from Charmaz (2006) and Corbin and Strauss (1998), and describes it as “breaking down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examining them, and comparing them for similarities and differences. The goal of initial coding...is to remain open to all possible theoretical directions indicated by your data.” Saldana and Charmaz both argue for a line-by-line initial coding sequence to perform a “microanalysis” of the corpus. This microanalysis allowed me to create small, targeted codes that were flexible and widely applicable in a range of situations. As my coding developed, I created larger codes that covered multiple codes from my earlier coding stages to direct my attention toward the elements of texts, talk, and action that related to my research questions. These larger codes were later axially aligned—that is, they were put into relationships with

one another via a set of organizing codes—in order to identify a theoretical understanding of how writing happened in this classroom. That is, the axial codes helped to construct a best explanation of the set of classroom writing data, which is described in greater detail in chapter five.

Grounded theory allowed me to explore in some detail the complex situation within which students and teachers engage with and in talk, tools, and texts to accomplish goals. It not only helped me see what they did, but how they perceived what they did. A grounded theory framework of initial and axial codes created descriptive summaries that both provided insight into a given situation and allowed that situation to be defined with a term that could carry across into other situations. In this manner, I was able to see not only how students and teachers took up talk, tools, and text in a given instance but how they took those up in the same instances over time.

As this chapter and the next develop, it will become clear to the reader that a GT analysis was not the final step in my process of answering my research questions—or, at least, GT as it is understood via Corbin and Strauss, Saldana, and Farkas and Haas. GT, via the specific activities of data collection and analysis shown below, provided me with an overview of writing in this classroom, and allowed me to understand how writing in one moment connected to other, future writing moments. However, in order to understand how people made individuated sense of specific writing moments to grow and change as writers over time, I use my GT findings to create, as can be seen in chapter four, a literate act analysis. This later analysis, while diverging from the specifics of GT and relying more heavily on the Vygotsky/Bakhtinian/Volosinovic –based approaches of Prior (1998) and Bazerman (2013), draws from the findings of GT, which helps this project locate literate

activity within “the larger events in a social, political, cultural, racial, gender-related, informational, and technological framework” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 8) and address the more complex and only tacitly acknowledged aspects of writing that GT, on its own, would not be able to reach. GT, for this project, proves an invaluable starting point that grounds, in a richly contextualized framework, the activity-based literate act analysis that follows it.

### **Record Collection and Activity Tracing**

The overall intention of the observation, interview, and document collection described below, as well as the intentions for the grounded theory approach described above, is to identify the streams of activity (Prior, 1998) that are both available and taken up by actors in given situations, as well as how those streams and situations are constructed. Paying close attention to the language and actions that students and teachers use in given classroom moments, as well as following the materials used and created for and in those moments, identifies trails of laminated activity orchestrations that can be traced over time. In the subsections below, I detail my approach to making observations, conducting interviews, and collecting material from both Emily and her students. These record-collecting decisions enable the tracing of laminated activities, which can later be anchored to the constantly-reproduced realities that the students and teacher work within to accomplish classroom activity together.

As established in the previous chapter and above sections, tracing laminated activities and coding the interactions of people through grounded theory and an ethnomethodologically-rooted understanding of the construction of reality is not a contradiction but a way of getting at the wider implications of human activity and the effects that one’s understanding in a given situation influences the outcome of that situation within a



larger scheme of activity. Tracing activity allows this study to identify the orchestration of laminated activity, which provides clues about the impact of distanced sponsoring forces on the events that occur in the classroom. Furthermore, the tracing of laminated activity helps us more carefully understand how people in given situations make sense of their opportunities. It provides clues, when traced over time, to the available avenues of activity that both student and teacher perceive themselves as having. This perception of opportunities for action, furthermore, helps us more clearly understand how people construct their realities with others over time. The historical use of talk, tools, and text indicates the permeable, fragile reality that actors wrap themselves in in order to figure out how to act in new situations as they arise.

**Classroom observations.** Throughout the school year, I observed 180 lessons during 93 visits. During these observations, I sat in the back of the classroom and took notes on the classroom activities, occasionally moving around the room to see what individual students are doing to inform my later analysis. To take the notes, I follow a method that I developed during a series of pilot observations at the end of the 2012-2013 school year.

My note-taking is completed in an 8 ½ by 11-inch notebook. Each classroom observation receives a number, and the observation number, date, and time is recorded at the start of each observation. I begin taking notes when the instructor begins speaking to the class, which is normally just before or immediately following the ringing of the bell to start the period. On the far left of the page, I record the time of a given event. This is not a minute-to-minute recording, but rather a regular checking of the time as the period progresses. This allows me to determine, later, the general length of time an activity or set of activities took.

To the right of the time, I note the activities that are going on in the classroom. These activities are attributed either to a student or a teacher. Attributions to the teacher are marked with “T,” while attributions to a student or multiple students are marked with “S.” Students who were selected for this study were noted with their pseudonym in parentheses. I summarize the activity of the class in a few words so that I can make it clear what is happening while at the same time keep up with the events of the classroom. Each event is written on a separate line. To the right of these event summaries, I take down any quotes that stand out to me if I have time to write them.

After I complete observations of both classes, I record, using Dragon Dictation, a summary of the entire event from the notes I took in class. The focus of both the in-class notes and the summary is to provide an overview of the events of the class as well as the way that those events were structured by the teacher and the way those structures were used by the students. These observations are particularly useful in revealing the opportunities for action that are both seen as possible and taken up by students and teachers throughout the school year.

**Audiovisual recordings.** In addition to the classroom observations, audiovisual recordings were taken regularly throughout the school year. Emily’s College Prep class had a high turnover rate of students, and the gaps in obtaining video permission forms ended up limiting the recording options in that classroom. However, I was still able to obtain focused recordings of my selected students in action during the class period.

When I did complete recordings, I attempted to record an entire class period, even if I was only intending to focus on a single event. Recording the entire event allowed me to

reach forward or backward in time more easily and identify words, phrases, and actions that connected with my moment in question.

Whenever possible, the classroom recordings were done at a wide angle in order to capture the activity of all students during the class period. This allowed me to track networks of student interaction, which enabled me to separate students with highly prominent connections among students from those with lower connections.

**Interviews.** My interview process occurred in three phases. During my first phase, I chose one student, Holly, as a pilot study (Table 1). I conducted four interviews with Holly from October to January. In February and March, I used the results of these interviews to inform my refined questions and interviewed the other nine students (Table 2).

Due to time constraints, I had to conduct my interviews with students in small pieces. Due to transportation and scheduling difficulties, students were often unavailable before or after school. I found time to interview students after class, although I had to limit the number of questions I could ask in a given interview. The fourth period students had to go to lunch after class, and fifth period had to move on to the final class of the day. As a result, I had to limit my interview times to between three and five minutes. While I was able to ask students the questions I wanted to, I had to do this over a longer period of time.

I organized these questions to elicit student beliefs about their own writing, the writing they do in class, and the writing that they expect to do in the future. Furthermore, I asked them questions that allowed them to verbalize how they make sense of given activities. These questions proved extremely helpful in showing how students made sense of the limits and possibilities offered to them by the course.

**Table 3.2: Holly's Interview Questions**

<b>Interview</b>	<b>Questions</b>
1 (11/14/13)	1) How would you describe your writing? 2) What kinds of writing do you do out of class? When? Where? 3) Is there a connection between your out of class and in class writing? 4) What are your strengths and weaknesses as a writer?
2 (12/19/13)	1) How are you handling the "Do Now" assignments so far? 2) What can you tell me about prepositions and prepositional phrases? 3) Why do you do the "Do Nows"? 4) How do you feel the "Do Now" assignments have helped you?
3 (2/11/14)	1) What is the process that you went through with this writing? 2) What similar things do you do across other writing assignments? 3) How do you interact with (Emily) for this writing? 4) What do you take away from grades and teacher comments about your writing?

**Table 3.3: Revised Interview Questions**

<b>Interview</b>	<b>Questions</b>
1	1) How would you describe your writing? 2) Do you do any kinds of writing that isn't for class? If so, when? Where? 3) Is there a question for your school and non-school writing? 4) What are your strengths and weaknesses as a writer?
2	1) How are you doing with the "Do Now" assignments?

	2) Why do you think (Emily) assigns the “Do Now”? 3) How do you feel they have helped you? 4) How do you feel the argumentative writing activities went?
3	1) What is the process that you went through with this writing? 2) What similar things do you do across other writing assignments? 3) How did you interact with (Emily) for this writing? 4) What did you take away from the grades and teacher comments about your writing?
4	1) How do you feel you’ve changed as a writer throughout the year? 2) How have you changed overall throughout the year? 3) What was your favorite writing? Why? 4) Has your writing changed in any other times or places?

In addition to interviewing students, I have interviewed Holly on six occasions during the past two years. These interviews have been formally set up ahead of time, with records constructed by both note-taking and audio recording. In addition to those interviews, I have spoken to Emily informally before, between, and after classes throughout the school year. Since the school takes its lunch period between the two classes I am observing, Emily and I sometimes have lunch together and discuss class activities, situations within the larger school, politics, television shows, and our local chapter of the National Writing Project.

Emily’s interviews were semi-structured and designed to allow Emily to take advantage of extended periods of discussion about class while away from the classroom. Since I was able to ask Emily targeted questions (i.e., “where did you get the idea for that activity?”) during moments of our informal conversation, I was willing to take our

conversations wherever Emily wanted to go. These interviews, like Holly's interviews, were coded in order to trace the connection of genre sets, genre systems, activity systems, intertextuality, and community values across records.

**Document collection.** I collected writing documentation as often as possible. Emily's superb classroom organization made document collection extremely easy. Throughout the quarter, Emily had students organize their writing in a specific section of their school binder (a three-inch, three-ring binder that they brought to school every day). On a regular basis, students turned these sections of work in for a grade. In addition to this writing, students completed projects, both on paper and online, and wrote in a writer's notebook. Emily collected and scored all of these in a very systematic manner, which enabled me to be systematic in my own data collection. It was because of Emily's commitment to organizational effectiveness with regard to the many class documents available that I was able to collect the range of documents that I did.

Although I had collected data from many students, I chose to focus on the writing of the ten students (see below) for deep inspection. Their documents were scanned in class, sometimes by simply borrowing a student's notebook for a few minutes while the students were completing another task.

I collected as much writing as I could from those ten students throughout the school year, regardless of the amount of writing, the form of writing, or the frequency with which the writing occurred. This provided me with a large corpus of written work that enabled me to make wider intertextual connections and better trace students' pathways of development.

## Coding Procedures – Field Notes, Observational Notes, and Interviews

The above records collected from the ten students were openly coded through multiple rounds in order to arrive at an informed, selected-coding level. To begin with, all of the notebooks written in the field were coded according to three categories: writing completed, writing referenced, and writing values. This allowed me to identify, in as much of an *in vivo* manner as possible<sup>7</sup>, some very clear writing moments or references to writing that occurred during class.

After the first 40 observations, these codes were generalized to carry across different lessons. For example, codes that were initially *in vivo*, such as “restorative justice worksheet” (an activity that students in all classes completed different portions of during different periods throughout the day) became “district-level writing,” so that it could be aligned with other writing that the assigned students to complete on a regular basis in different classes. These more generalized codes were used on the remainder of the observational sheets and tracked over time, so that larger patterns of writing demands could be seen in the classroom. Later, these codes were axially aligned, or organized under headings that identified the relationships among more generalized codes.

In addition to the fieldnotes, my observational notes—which were written as soon as possible after the observations—were coded in an open manner. While these observations also included the *in vivo* writing codes of the above notebooks, their more detailed nature allowed me to expand into aspects of classroom activity that did not necessarily have a direct

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<sup>7</sup> The *in vivo* codes used were sometimes abbreviated for the sake of note-taking or memo writing, although the abbreviated version remained tightly linked to the full term used by the students in the class.

and immediate connection to writing instruction, such as one-on-one student-teacher interactions, the formation of class norms, and the evolving pattern of classroom activity. Through these notes, I was able to provide a wider view of the reality within which learning to write took place. Furthermore, I was able to trace the flow of the school day throughout the year through more than just the writing that students were required to do in a given class.

The interviews that I conducted were also coded in an open-coding fashion, which allowed me to focus on what the students brought to the surface as well as what the teacher privileged in her understandings of the classroom. These open codes were also used to connect to writing, but with a more detailed look at the emotions the students and teacher held toward different kinds of writing, how they valued the outcomes of different writing attempts, and how they saw that writing fit into the larger picture of their overall school experiences. In short, these interviews allowed me to see how the events of the class were interpreted and taken up by those involved in the co-construction of the events.

The coding of my fieldnotes, my observational notes, and my interviews eventually led to the creation of a series of interconnected, axially-aligned codes linking classroom activities (including writing) to one another while also providing a narrow enough set of identifiers to trace the impact of other localities (i.e., distant sponsoring forces) on the classroom. Beginning again with my fieldnotes and, in particular, the writing completed, writing referenced, and writing values that I identified within them, I began connecting what happened in the classroom with the world outside of the classroom—i.e., the Common Core, AVID, district guidelines, and the values of a teacher education program.

I did this by coding for the genre ecology connections, activity laminations, and sponsors of literacy in the space next to my codes for “writing values,” “writing referenced,”



and “writing completed.” This approach allowed me to target writing references or activity that occurred with *in vivo* codes while, at the same time, anchoring those codes to categories for easier reference during analysis. The *in vivo* coding allowed me to tie my findings to the other codes established during my early coding process (i.e., that were established by following Saldana’s approach), and the categories allowed me to separate the different ways in which the same kind of writing cropped up. Re-coding my material in this manner allowed me to identify how the different, interconnected codes that I had identified were sharing time and space with one another. Furthermore, in order to more easily draw out the historical connections amongst my codes, I attempted to use—as often as appropriate—in *vivo* codes that described activities, writing assignments, and sponsoring influences. See Figure 3.1 for this pattern.

**Figure 3.1: Re-coding material: an early example**

Source of Learning	Activity Location	Genre/Early Coding	Writing Values	Writing Retention	Writing Completion
WCTE Reading AVID AVID PEP AVID TEP	11:20 11:25 11:30 11:35 11:40 11:45 11:50 11:55 12:00 12:05 12:10 12:15 12:20 12:25 12:30 12:35 12:40 12:45 12:50 12:55 13:00 13:05 13:10 13:15 13:20 13:25 13:30 13:35 13:40 13:45 13:50 13:55 14:00 14:05 14:10 14:15 14:20 14:25 14:30 14:35 14:40 14:45 14:50 14:55 15:00 15:05 15:10 15:15 15:20 15:25 15:30 15:35 15:40 15:45 15:50 15:55 16:00 16:05 16:10 16:15 16:20 16:25 16:30 16:35 16:40 16:45 16:50 16:55 17:00 17:05 17:10 17:15 17:20 17:25 17:30 17:35 17:40 17:45 17:50 17:55 18:00 18:05 18:10 18:15 18:20 18:25 18:30 18:35 18:40 18:45 18:50 18:55 19:00 19:05 19:10 19:15 19:20 19:25 19:30 19:35 19:40 19:45 19:50 19:55 20:00 20:05 20:10 20:15 20:20 20:25 20:30 20:35 20:40 20:45 20:50 20:55 21:00 21:05 21:10 21:15 21:20 21:25 21:30 21:35 21:40 21:45 21:50 21:55 22:00 22:05 22:10 22:15 22:20 22:25 22:30 22:35 22:40 22:45 22:50 22:55 23:00 23:05 23:10 23:15 23:20 23:25 23:30 23:35 23:40 23:45 23:50 23:55 24:00 24:05 24:10 24:15 24:20 24:25 24:30 24:35 24:40 24:45 24:50 24:55 25:00 25:05 25:10 25:15 25:20 25:25 25:30 25:35 25:40 25:45 25:50 25:55 26:00 26:05 26:10 26:15 26:20 26:25 26:30 26:35 26:40 26:45 26:50 26:55 27:00 27:05 27:10 27:15 27:20 27:25 27:30 27:35 27:40 27:45 27:50 27:55 28:00 28:05 28:10 28:15 28:20 28:25 28:30 28:35 28:40 28:45 28:50 28:55 29:00 29:05 29:10 29:15 29:20 29:25 29:30 29:35 29:40 29:45 29:50 29:55 30:00 30:05 30:10 30:15 30:20 30:25 30:30 30:35 30:40 30:45 30:50 30:55 31:00 31:05 31:10 31:15 31:20 31:25 31:30 31:35 31:40 31:45 31:50 31:55 32:00 32:05 32:10 32:15 32:20 32:25 32:30 32:35 32:40 32:45 32:50 32:55 33:00 33:05 33:10 33:15 33:20 33:25 33:30 33:35 33:40 33:45 33:50 33:55 34:00 34:05 34:10 34:15 34:20 34:25 34:30 34:35 34:40 34:45 34:50 34:55 35:00 35:05 35:10 35:15 35:20 35:25 35:30 35:35 35:40 35:45 35:50 35:55 36:00 36:05 36:10 36:15 36:20 36:25 36:30 36:35 36:40 36:45 36:50 36:55 37:00 37:05 37:10 37:15 37:20 37:25 37:30 37:35 37:40 37:45 37:50 37:55 38:00 38:05 38:10 38:15 38:20 38:25 38:30 38:35 38:40 38:45 38:50 38:55 39:00 39:05 39:10 39:15 39:20 39:25 39:30 39:35 39:40 39:45 39:50 39:55 40:00 40:05 40:10 40:15 40:20 40:25 40:30 40:35 40:40 40:45 40:50 40:55 41:00 41:05 41:10 41:15 41:20 41:25 41:30 41:35 41:40 41:45 41:50 41:55 42:00 42:05 42:10 42:15 42:20 42:25 42:30 42:35 42:40 42:45 42:50 42:55 43:00 43:05 43:10 43:15 43:20 43:25 43:30 43:35 43:40 43:45 43:50 43:55 44:00 44:05 44:10 44:15 44:20 44:25 44:30 44:35 44:40 44:45 44:50 44:55 45:00 45:05 45:10 45:15 45:20 45:25 45:30 45:35 45:40 45:45 45:50 45:55 46:00 46:05 46:10 46:15 46:20 46:25 46:30 46:35 46:40 46:45 46:50 46:55 47:00 47:05 47:10 47:15 47:20 47:25 47:30 47:35 47:40 47:45 47:50 47:55 48:00 48:05 48:10 48:15 48:20 48:25 48:30 48:35 48:40 48:45 48:50 48:55 49:00 49:05 49:10 49:15 49:20 49:25 49:30 49:35 49:40 49:45 49:50 49:55 50:00 50:05 50:10 50:15 50:20 50:25 50:30 50:35 50:40 50:45 50:50 50:55 51:00 51:05 51:10 51:15 51:20 51:25 51:30 51:35 51:40 51:45 51:50 51:55 52:00 52:05 52:10 52:15 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66:10 66:15 66:20 66:25 66:30 66:35 66:40 66:45 66:50 66:55 67:00 67:05 67:10 67:15 67:20 67:25 67:30 67:35 67:40 67:45 67:50 67:55 68:00 68:05 68:10 68:15 68:20 68:25 68:30 68:35 68:40 68:45 68:50 68:55 69:00 69:05 69:10 69:15 69:20 69:25 69:30 69:35 69:40 69:45 69:50 69:55 70:00 70:05 70:10 70:15 70:20 70:25 70:30 70:35 70:40 70:45 70:50 70:55 71:00 71:05 71:10 71:15 71:20 71:25 71:30 71:35 71:40 71:45 71:50 71:55 72:00 72:05 72:10 72:15 72:20 72:25 72:30 72:35 72:40 72:45 72:50 72:55 73:00 73:05 73:10 73:15 73:20 73:25 73:30 73:35 73:40 73:45 73:50 73:55 74:00 74:05 74:10 74:15 74:20 74:25 74:30 74:35 74:40 74:45 74:50 74:55 75:00 75:05 75:10 75:15 75:20 75:25 75:30 75:35 75:40 75:45 75:50 75:55 76:00 76:05 76:10 76:15 76:20 76:25 76:30 76:35 76:40 76:45 76:50 76:55 77:00 77:05 77:10 77:15 77:20 77:25 77:30 77:35 77:40 77:45 77:50 77:55 78:00 78:05 78:10 78:15 78:20 78:25 78:30 78:35 78:40 78:45 78:50 78:55 79:00 79:05 79:10 79:15 79:20 79:25 79:30 79:35 79:40 79:45 79:50 79:55 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93:50 93:55 94:00 94:05 94:10 94:15 94:20 94:25 94:30 94:35 94:40 94:45 94:50 94:55 95:00 95:05 95:10 95:15 95:20 95:25 95:30 95:35 95:40 95:45 95:50 95:55 96:00 96:05 96:10 96:15 96:20 96:25 96:30 96:35 96:40 96:45 96:50 96:55 97:00 97:05 97:10 97:15 97:20 97:25 97:30 97:35 97:40 97:45 97:50 97:55 98:00 98:05 98:10 98:15 98:20 98:25 98:30 98:35 98:40 98:45 98:50 98:55 99:00 99:05 99:10 99:15 99:20 99:25 99:30 99:35 99:40 99:45 99:50 99:55 100:00 100:05 100:10 100:15 100:20 100:25 100:30 100:35 100:40 100:45 100:50 100:55 101:00 101:05 101:10 101:15 101:20 101:25 101:30 101:35 101:40 101:45 101:50 101:55 102:00 102:05 102:10 102:15 102:20 102:25 102:30 102:35 102:40 102:45 102:50 102:55 103:00 103:05 103:10 103:15 103:20 103:25 103:30 103:35 103:40 103:45 103:50 103:55 104:00 104:05 104:10 104:15 104:20 104:25 104:30 104:35 104:40 104:45 104:50 104:55 105:00 105:05 105:10 105:15 105:20 105:25 105:30 105:35 105:40 105:45 105:50 105:55 106:00 106:05 106:10 106:15 106:20 106:25 106:30 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This coding approach provided me with a double-sided view of what was happening in the classroom: first, my finalized coding process allowed me to identify the interconnectedness of the different elements of the classroom; second, my re-coding process allowed me to identify the larger connections that my classroom had to other, more distant sites while also more deeply contextualizing the literate act constructions that I address in the next chapter.

The double-coding move also helped me move forward with selecting the times and places for analyzing writing and writing instruction. In order to avoid some of the complications of Graves (1981) and his team, I had to avoid selecting what were seemingly anecdotal moments of change in student writing and instead anchor my decisions to the ebb and flow of writing, teaching, and learning activity in the class. Seeing the broader connections among my codes laid out in time and linked to the larger world of school reform, curricular demands, and the daily life of a school made the selection of moments more methodical and easier to follow.

### **Coding Procedures – Video recordings and documents**

The field notes, observational notes, and interviews led to the creation of a set of axially-aligned, interrelated codes that helped me explain how all of the elements that I was finding in my notes were interconnected, and how the writing fit into that interconnection. Furthermore, the expansion of the coding to include writing ecologies, laminated activities, and sponsors of literacy showed how those codes overlapped in time, as well as how they related to other locations. These findings helped me determine specific moments of my observations to focus on for video and documentary coding.

The video that I took of both classes occurred on a regular basis. Of the ninety-plus classes that I observed in both periods, I have video of about seventy of them. The twenty missing lessons were due to either technological failures or an unexpected recording issue (i.e., an influx of students who had no permission forms signed, a sustained period of lesson interruptions by outside problems, etc.). The number of videos themselves proved immense by year's end, and the coding of the field notes and observational notes, as well as the interviews, made for the selection of video much easier.

The selection of video also led to the selection of course documents for examination, although the documents selected did not necessarily need to have been used in a selected video—rather, the documents selected had to inform the activity that was going on during the activity or be a subsequent result of that activity. This selection process narrowed the documents to be examined considerably.

Video was selected in several waves. During the first wave, video was selected based on (1) prominent writing activity; (2) connections across multiple writing episodes through sponsors of literacy, writing activity, or writing ecology (i.e., genre sets and systems) connections; and (3) clear evidence of the written activity of students. This first wave created many viable candidates for video analysis, which were then bounded through emic understandings of when an activity stopped and started. These videos were analyzed in two passes; those that had potential for informing this project's understanding of the writing activity of students were transcribed and coded.

After the first wave of video selection, I began working outward from my initial “writing-focused” lens toward classroom activities that left writing as a secondary activity, or only informed future writing activity in seemingly oblique ways. During this round, my

selection process allowed me to provide a much wider view of how writing happens in Emily's classroom (and what other classroom elements it is related to) than previous studies.

Despite the nonrandom selection of the documents, however, I elected to engage in a recursive coding process when applying my finalized coding to the video and documents that I later selected. In this manner, the work that I had completed earlier continued to inform how I observed the writing and classroom activity that I was examining, yet my method allowed me to revise my coding if I saw a more opportune way of characterizing activity on paper or in the classroom. However, codes that seemed to diverge strongly from the generalizations about the class in certain moments and teaching sequences were also kept apart so that they could be more carefully analyzed before being slipped into the more durable progression of the class.

The coding process from start to finish, then, consisted of an iterative series of coding that was informed by previous waves of codes, with new codes poised to, if necessary, revise earlier codes to create a more interconnected web of descriptive codes. It must be remembered here that the purpose of the coding was to determine (1) what the activity of the classroom was; (2) what kinds of classroom writing activity took place; and (3) how that writing activity and activity of the classroom changed over time. The recursive coding process indicated a tentative understanding of the more stable features of classroom life, while the selected moments of video and documentary coding provided a narrow slice of classroom life at given moments of time throughout the school year.

The video and written documents of students also required some coding that went beyond the extensive coding process of my field notes and observational notes. Since I wanted to see how writing activity changed in students over time, I had to track the actions of

students as they went about the act of writing: who did they talk to? What did they write with? How did they organize their environment for writing? What was the duration and scope of their writing? These elements were detailed as much as possible from selected video excerpts whenever possible. The initial activities were described in detailed observational notes. These observational notes were then coded to determine specific student actions, which I double-checked by reviewing the video again through the lens of the codes. Once several writing events had been coded, I was able to identify similarities and differences in writing activity over time. A series of writing moments in a single student allowed me to identify the writing activity development of specific students.

### **Memo Writing and Diagramming Across Coding Procedures**

Corbin and Strauss (2008) separate memo writing and diagramming from field notes: “Field notes are data that may contain some conceptualization and analytic remarks. Memos, on the other hand, are lengthier and more in-depth thoughts about an event, usually written in conceptual form after leaving the field” (p. 123). Memo writing, then, is a separate task from field notes, or even what I term “observational notes.” In both field notes and observational notes, my focus is on what I saw unfolding in the classroom. While my description of this will sometimes lead to conceptual or theoretical framing, for the most part, my field note and observational note writing remains stuck tightly to events that have happened. With my memo writing and diagramming, as I explain below, I step away from concrete activity and up toward a higher level of abstraction. This abstraction is a way to bring events that have happened in one situation into dialogue with events that happened in another situation. My memo writing and diagramming (and the abstractions that come with them) help me pull together my data in a more informed manner.

Across the entire coding process described above, I wrote memos about the developing coding process that allowed me to more carefully trace the understandings that were emerging from the *in vivo* process of coding and, later, through the more focused coding round. Furthermore, in keeping with Corbin and Strauss's (2008) understanding of grounded theory, I engaged in frequent diagramming based on that analysis. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008), "Memos are a specialized type of written records—those that contain the products of our analyses. Diagrams also arise from analysis. They are visual devices that portray possible relationships between concepts" (p. 117). Memos and diagrams allow the established codes to work together to form a more coherent understanding of the social events being coded.

Corbin and Strauss, building from earlier editions of their *Basics of Qualitative Research*, identify several different kinds of memos. They identify (1) open data exploration; (2) identifying/developing the properties and dimensions of concepts/categories; (3) making comparisons and asking questions; (4) elaborating the paradigm; and (5) developing a story line (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 118). While this separation of memo writing is helpful for the presentation of their own work and no doubt can help many other qualitative researchers, this project did not strictly follow these kinds of memo writing (although, at some point, all of those memos were written). Corbin and Strauss (2008) argue that "The important thing for the reader is that he or she not be concerned with writing memos according to each type. More important is to just get into the habit of writing memos" (p. 118). Following this advice, I wrote memos and diagrams as necessary to help me construct a detailed understanding of what was happening in Emily's classroom and in the interviews I conducted. Using these "rather rudimentary representations of thought," (Corbin

& Strauss, 2008, p. 119), I was able to step away from the crowded field notes and observational notes that I took and more carefully explore the possibilities they offered. I constructed my memos in Word documents, and I traced my diagrams in a separate artist's portfolio notebook.

Memo writing occurred as often as possible, although the writing did not occur at regular intervals. Memo writing was also widely varied in length: my earliest memos were rather brief, and gained in depth and complexity over time. Furthermore, my memos were not written with grounded theory only in mind. In my coding process above, I note how I moved away from the theoretically sensitive codes that I established when examining the classroom so that I could trace the impact of forces outside the classroom on classroom writing activity. My memo writing and, in particular, my diagramming helped me accomplish this, revealing for me the complex interconnections between different (and quite different-looking) social forces. In fact, this memo writing helped me bridge the gap between my theoretically sensitive codes and categories and my more expansive codes.

### **Collection and Coding Appropriateness for Materials, Participants, and Setting**

This coding methodology is appropriate for the research site reviewed below according to several criteria: space, time, availability, and activity. First, the space of the classroom—not to mention the organization of the space of that classroom—lent itself naturally to very specific approaches to studying the classroom while looking to answer the research questions. The size of the room—and the size of the class—restricted rather heavily my movements within the room, and although Emily's classroom management was effective in regulating student behavior throughout the year, my movements within it could jeopardize her success, particularly in her fifth period class. However, my unobtrusive video collection

and note-taking methods allowed her to carry out her classroom duties successfully and managed to avoid directing the attention of the students in the classroom.

My approach to data collection is also appropriate for my research site due to issues of time. The organization of the classroom day prevented a great deal of my interviewing intentions with students, and Emily's extremely busy school year also caused trouble when it came to organizing interviews. However, by organizing short bursts of interviews that lasted about 3-4 minutes for students, I was able to collect multiple points of view on given writing activities while, at the same time, respecting the time boundaries of the classroom. Furthermore, my data collection methods during class took no time out of the days of students and teachers.

Availability was also a significant problem that my data collection and coding methods were able to solve. As the class met on a regular basis throughout the year, and the classes were bookended by other classes that Emily had to teach and students had to attend, reaching out for interviews and data collection was extremely difficult. However, by providing opportunities for shortened interviews and finding quick ways to make copies, I was able to collect interview data and documents within the very narrow space of availability that I had.

The activity of the classroom was the final difficulty in this research that my data collection and coding methodologies allowed me to address. Although the students remained seated for most of the period, the different activities that the students performed throughout the class was wide – on most days, I tracked three separate writing activities per full class period. When looking at a wider scale—changes of activity over the course of days or weeks, for example—the activities became even more widely varied. While this may have been



useful in raising student engagement, it provided some difficulties for my own work. I had to find a way to keep my recording of events in the classroom consistent while the activities around me changed, sometimes dramatically. The unobtrusive video and note-taking procedures that I developed helped me to track the activity without getting in the way or being hampered by the changes, and my coding procedures allowed me to address connections across a wide variety of activities.

Because of the way that they adequately handled problems of space, time, availability, and activity in Emily's classroom, my data collection methods are appropriate for the research site described below. Furthermore, due to its ability to adapt to changing intentions and activity over time, my coding methods described above are ideal of tracing the sometimes-complicated social world of Emily's classroom in ways that bring forward the realities that constitute and are constituted by writing activity. The materials, participants, and setting below, then, are not simply appropriate for the theoretical frame and research questions provided, but are well matched with the methodology proposed for the study as well.

### **Materials, Participants, Setting**

In order to explore the literate acts that people perform across trajectories of development, I intend to trace the literate acts of ten students in two seventh grade language arts classes throughout an entire school year. My selection of the classroom and students was a result of both careful planning and serendipity. I first met my selected teacher, Emily, at a local branch of the National Writing Project. Emily was a veteran, highly educated teacher who would receive her National Board Certification during the course of this study. I initially chose Emily as a research subject because she was (1) willing and (2) clearly

dedicated to her craft and her students. Because of her dedication, Emily became what Merton (1987) would have referred to as “Nature’s microscope:” her dedication made the influence of sponsors of literacy easy to see, and her regular interactions with students—as well as her classroom management skills—brought to light the intertextual, laminated, intersubjective nature of literate acts. Emily’s teaching persona created situations that allowed me to more easily explore my research questions and construct both tentative conclusions and categories for future research.

During my year observing her, Emily taught four classes. Two of these classes were titled “Honors,” and the other two were titled “College Prep.” Each of these classes served a very different set of academic abilities and, as will be seen, socioeconomic status. I selected one class with each title. Since each class was held for the same length of time, I was able to select classes that met both my scheduling needs and Emily’s comfort level. I ended up observing period four and five, which occurred around the school’s lunch period. Being on campus for lunch allowed me extra time to interview and get to know both students and Emily. I also was able to speak with teachers, students, and student teachers from beyond my classroom. These interactions helped me get a feel for the rich social atmosphere that made up Goodland Middle School.

My observations of classroom lessons served as an excellent starting point, but, as I was looking for rich points of data to identify developmental trajectories, I had to narrow down my subjects. My primary concern for variation was comfort level with writing. Since I wanted to look at how relationships developed around literate acts, I thought that the level of comfort with performing those literate acts would serve as a key variable in the establishment, growth, and maintenance of relationships between student and teacher around

writing. Toward that end, I began to look for comfort level with writing that various students had. I initially decided on two levels of comfort: students who wrote frequently on their own, and students who did not. As I gained information, however, I ended up creating a more nuanced set of differences regarding student comfort level.

Using conversations with both students and Emily as a starting point—as well as observing interactions between Emily and some of her students—I was able to hone in on students who clearly wrote a great deal. I identified two students who both wrote a great deal (one male, one female). From there, I identified two other students (again, both male and female) who wrote outside of class but either less frequently or in different ways.

Having identified four strong writers (all of whom were in Honors Language Arts), I located six other students who, while comfortable to a certain degree with writing (they did not have dysgraphia or any other learning disabilities that were writing specific), were not the kind of committed out of class writers that my first four students were. Two of these students (one male, one female) were in Honors Language Arts, and the remaining four (two male, two female) were in College Prep Language Arts. After identifying the students as focal students in late September, I focused in particular on their literate acts throughout the remainder of the school year.

I selected my students to capture the variation in comfort levels with writing, but this variation itself proved to be wrapped up in socioeconomic status, personality, and past experiences. However, whatever variation I was able to take in these and other areas was a side effect of my selection of students based on comfort with writing.

After I had selected my students, I created a more refined leveling of differences in comfort level with writing. The “highest” level of writing comfort went to Rachel and Zack,

two students who considered themselves to be writers, who made writing part of their self-identification when discussing it. Two other writers, Don and Holly, were high achieving writers who enjoyed writing, wrote on their own regularly, and took pains with their own classroom writing, but who did not tie their identities to writing as Rachel and Zack did. Dan and Alice, who occupy the next level of the writing comfort zones, do not write much outside of school. Dan writes largely for situational reasons, and Alice writes for herself in a journal on an irregular basis. These are successful writers who write on their own when the moment strikes them, but who otherwise do the writing that they are assigned without difficulty. Nick and Marianne are advanced writers who do no writing outside of the classroom that they have made mention of. Clarence and Alice are proficient writers who do no writing outside of the classroom. Alice is a more capable writer than Clarence, but does not reach the advanced level of Nick and Marianne.

Obviously, there are other writers of lesser ability in Emily's classes. There are writers who labor intensively over assigned writings and make slow gains throughout the school year. There are also students with disabilities that inhibit their ability to take up writing in ways similar to their fellow students. However, these students were hard to reach for many reasons (primarily, however, because they either did not return the parent permission forms or because they did not wish to talk to me), and, even if they had been, they may not have proven to be the natural microscopes into literate action that the ten students I selected were. Below, I describe each of these students and their class situations in some detail.

**Goodland Middle School.** Goodland Middle School is located in Southern California. Due to Southern California's regularly beautiful weather, the school is largely an

outdoor one, with students moving outdoors between classes. Sidewalks wind around large trees and grassy plots of land before landing in front of entire sets of classrooms. The school was built along with many other surrounding schools during a great push to expand the basic infrastructure of the United States in the middle of the twentieth century. Goodland is built like many of the schools around it, with sturdy but aging concrete and sparse but effective style. Since Goodland enjoys moderate temperatures and dry climate on most days, the classes are minimally prepared for those moments when poor weather does sweep in. As a result, poor conditions such as “extreme” heat or cold—of the kind that would not even penetrate the insulation of a house in another part of the country—can bring significant trouble to the classroom. Emily’s students struggled with the heat of the classroom during the first several weeks of the school year, despite her best efforts to circulate the air, and they struggled with the mild chill of winter, since the heating in Emily’s room proved largely nonexistent.

**Language Arts – College Prep.** The College Prep Language Arts course is designed for mainstreamed students who will move on to college prep-level courses in the high school. These students are capable middle school students without the ability to work extensively on their own like the honors students, but also without the more severe learning disabilities or behavioral disorders that students in some of the smaller, more carefully structured classes have. In short, this level covers a large swath of the students at Goodland. Students are more likely to be assigned here than anywhere else. Some students, such as Marianne and Nick, though capable of succeeding in Honors, were assigned to College Prep by chance circumstance.

**Language Arts – Honors.** The Honors Language Arts course is a preparatory course for students who will be entering AP-level classes when they reach high school. These courses are similar in format to the College Prep courses, but contain longer writing assignments, a higher level of out-of-class work, and less frequent oversight by Emily. These students had been designated honors students upon leaving their elementary schools by their classroom teachers. While a few of these students would have been GATE students had the GATE program remained in use at the school, many other students are high achieving students who do well in class but do not possess extraordinary (i.e., IQ beyond the norm) intelligence or academic prowess.

The differences between Honors and College Prep Language Arts are striking in many ways. Many of Emily's teaching methods remain similar, although additional structure, a workload reduction, and an increase in class time commitment often occur for the College Prep course. However, the ethnic makeup of the class, as well as the socioeconomic status of the class, remain vividly different. A clear, obvious majority of the students in the fourth period Honors class I observe are either of European or Asian descent, while the majority of students in the fifth period College Prep course I observe are of Mexican or South American descent.

The differences between the classes in terms of out of class activity is also striking. Holly, a fourth period student, writes about archery, horseback riding, and building amateur rockets with her father. Clarence, a fifth period student, does not write about such a wide variety of activities in his class. Rather, he writes about daily activities, hanging out with friends, or engaging in activities in the local community.

**Emily's Classroom.** Emily's classroom is located in the far back corner of the school, nestled between another English teacher's classroom and a hallway leading to an attached charter school. Outside of the classroom runs a sidewalk that winds across a small grove of trees and classrooms to the auditorium, computer lab, offices, and a massive common area that the students use for lunch. A set of windows in the back of Emily's classroom looks out over the trees, walkways, and other classrooms.

Students enter Emily's classroom in the back right corner of the classroom. To their left runs, beneath the windows, a combination of bookshelves and class materials. Next to the door sit a garbage can and a set of shelves dedicated to school-related texts. Just past that, Emily has put a large cart of class materials. On top of the materials rests a large set of cubby holes that Emily uses to put spare worksheets, handouts, etc. from the week's lessons. Students who are absent can draw their missing materials from here. On top of the cubbyholes are baskets for returned work and late work.

Another set of shelves for school-related texts rests on the other side of the class materials. Next to that is Emily's personal library, which contains a set of young adult literature that students can sign out if they wish. Emily has a set of boxed books (presumably also course-related) next to her library. The corner that connects the back wall to the far left wall contains a small closet that I have never seen Emily use.

The far left wall is dedicated largely to technology. Emily has three Apple laptops in the classroom, two of which she acquired with a grant and one of which she brought from home. These laptops are locked in a closet every night, but are left out during the school day for students to use. The laptops are on long, low tables that occupy the middle space of the wall. Behind them rest more course textbooks that students rely on for certain units. To the

left of the laptops rests a printer. This printer is for Emily's use but is also linked to other teacher computers in Emily's hallway, as teachers regularly enter the room to pick up printed material. Between the printer and the closet there is a spare desk, where I regularly sit during my observations.

To the right of the laptops, running all the way to the corner between the left wall and the front wall of the room, is a set of closets that Emily keeps locked. These closets contain benchmark writing assessments, and, at night, the laptops. The closets also contain more of Emily's class supplies, such as glue sticks and colored pencils.

The front of the room is taken up almost entirely by Emily's white board. A small blank space between the closet and the whiteboard is taken up by a rolling bulletin board. The whiteboard runs from the bulletin board to Emily's desk, which takes up—along with another closet and a set of filing cabinets—the corner of the room between the front wall and the right wall. Early in the year, Emily's desk faced the left wall, which allowed her to come out from behind her desk more easily and work with students. Later in the year, however, Emily moved her desk to face away from the front wall, so that she could sit behind her desk and look out over the students in the classroom. Behind Emily's desks are several small bulletin boards with various personal and public items tacked on to them.

Above the whiteboard and bulletin boards are a large-screen LCD television, which Emily uses frequently through her AppleTV and her document camera. Emily also has several posters scattered along the upper edge of her walls, not just in the front of the room but on the left and right walls as well. These posters contain directions for classroom activity, definitions of important terms, examples of student work, and posters of literature, poetry, movies, etc.



The right wall of Emily's classroom, which runs back to the door, is largely covered with student work. The closet, filing cabinet, and desk of Emily's take space away from the corner of the wall, but the rest of the wall, at eye level, is dedicated to large bulletin boards containing student work. Emily changes these boards every few weeks, giving many different students the opportunity to have their work displayed. However, she rarely references the boards during her work in class.

Above these boards are more guidelines for students. She has several handwritten posters that describe the purposes of English, entry and exit routines, group work reminders, and reminders of "how to earn an A" for small writing assignments. This wall also contains the clock, which ran about a minute fast for most of the school year.

Inside of these walls sit, in addition to Emily's desk and two smaller desks that she uses to collect student work and organize her handouts prior to a lesson, thirty-seven desks. These desks are arranged in nine groups of four. The nine groups are also aligned in three rows of three. The desks of the middle row point straight ahead, while the desks on either side of the middle row are angled slightly to allow students to see the front center of the board while looking straight ahead.

**Emily.** Emily is a fifteen-year veteran of the classroom. A graduate of the UC system with a BA in English, Emily earned her teaching credential and M.Ed. through the UC system as well before moving into the classroom. Emily is a National Writing Project fellow who frequently participates in her local NWP branch even now. The year before the current study, Emily completed her submission for the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). She was awarded National Board Certification during the winter of my data collection, which she earned on her first submission.

The start of Emily's career, by her own account, had been rather difficult, particularly in terms of classroom management issues. To say she has since resolved this issue would be an understatement: Emily's classroom is by far the most efficiently run that I have ever seen. Students have clearly demarcated rules for participation and activity, neatly defined times for assigned reading and writing activities, and regularized routines that students have learned throughout the day.

Emily's classroom management is surpassed only by her command of her subject matter. Emily possesses the outward credentials (NBCT, M.Ed.) to signal that she understands how her subject matter works and how to teach it to her students in multiple, effective ways, and her activities within the classroom realizes those credentials. During her time as a classroom teacher, NWP Fellow, and leader within her department, Emily has constructed a set of understandings about teaching her craft that she would deploy in order to deal with the constant reforms that she has endured throughout the duration of her teaching career.

**Rachel.** Rachel was a new student at the start of the school year. The memory of middle schoolers being what they are, of course, by the middle of the year it seemed—at least to this researcher—as if Rachel has always been a member of the student body. But, when I first met her, Rachel was rather shy and clearly uncomfortable with the less structured activities of the school day, such as lunch. For the first few days of the school year, Rachel remained behind after students left, talking with Emily about various topics. Emily, aware that Rachel needed to get to know students, spoke with Rachel but also made certain that she was going to lunch to meet with other students. Eventually Rachel made friends and lost her

uncertainty as well as much of her shyness. However, she continued to remain behind in Emily's classroom after the bell, as the two ended up sharing many reading interests.

Rachel sees herself as a writer. She writes frequently outside of class, both stories and poems. She tends to write for her own purposes, without the express goal of sharing her writing with others. She writes stories, poems, plot lines, and sometimes diary entries, although she does not keep a diary. In class, she is both well spoken and outspoken, frequently participating in class discussions.

**Zack.** Zack is a clever, outgoing, and sometimes daring pre-teen. He writes regularly, and, like Rachel, considers himself to be a writer. A great deal of the writing that Zack does out of class involves character development and storylines. He is the photographer for the school newspaper as well as an able artist. Zack commits heavily to many kinds of writing and seems comfortable writing in many situations.

Despite his considerable academic talent, however, Zack seems to chafe at the bounds of schooling. Zack tends to walk the line between appropriate behavior and insubordination. He frequently speaks out of turn and often has to be reprimanded by Emily because of it. However, unlike some of his classmates, he is wise enough not to be reprimanded into anything beyond an occasional ten-minute lunch detention. I have also noted that he frequently attempts to push Emily's buttons. At the beginning of the year, he said "Yar" instead of "yes" when responding to questions. When this got no rise from Emily, he dropped it. He will also answer questions unnecessarily loudly, or with unnecessary detail, or with some other slight twist beyond the expected response as defined by the previous actions of other students in the classroom.

So Zack, who like Rachel is a self-identified writer, pushes at the boundaries of what is acceptable classroom behavior while avoiding punishment. As a result, he and Emily have an effective teacher-student relationship, although he occasionally pushes too far beyond the boundaries with other teachers around. He managed to get himself thrown out of the library by pushing back against classroom standards when the school librarian, not Emily, was in earshot.

**Holly.** Holly has grown up a great deal throughout the course of this school year. Initially a shy, reticent student who only occasionally raised her hand, Holly has become close with several other students in the classroom and has been participating regularly since midyear. Holly was in one of the first small group videos that I took during my observations. When I asked her group if I could tape them, I could barely hear her agreement, and I was just about completely unable to make out a word she said during the discussion. Two months later, I wanted to try out a new camera while the students were working in the computer lab. I asked Holly if she would mind me filming her while she completed a task on the computer. “I’m just trying out the camera to make sure it works,” I said. “I doubt I’ll even use the video, unless you do something awesome.” “Well,” she replied, with a straight face, “I’m probably going to do something awesome, so go ahead.” Holly also has the distinction of remembering her pseudonym instead of looking crestfallen and assuming I forgot her name every time I use it during an interview.

**Don.** Don, an honors student from the AVID program, is a very active student who regularly talks with other students throughout the class period. Unlike Zack, however, Don does not push at the edges of classroom boundaries. He is a strategic speaker, rarely

addressed by the teacher for speaking out of turn. He also participates regularly, although he clearly does not always enjoy this role.

Don is a capable writer and artist. His writer's notebook is littered with detailed sketches of people from some kind of cartoon or video with which I am completely unfamiliar. His writing is also superior, and he regularly receives high marks for his efforts. However, Don does not self-identify as a writer; rather, making stories is something that he does with friends. The link between academic writing and personal writing, for Don, has not yet been made.

**Alice.** Alice started the school year as quiet or perhaps more quiet than Holly. Unlike Holly, however, she never became more outspoken. My interviews with Alice strain the ear, as her soft-spoken voice is easily overshadowed by passersby in the hallway, other students speaking across the room, and, in one case, music being played by Emily. I am often forced to assume that she responds in kind when I say "good morning" to her. Despite her shyness, however, Alice is an extremely successful student in Emily's class. She makes up for her unwillingness to talk to people by taking a great deal of notes on her papers when Emily is providing the class with directions. She clearly structures her classroom activity so that she does not have to engage with either Emily or other students if she can at all avoid it.

**Dan.** Dan is an energetic, capable student who seems to get along easily with everyone in the classroom. The center of his world is sports, not academia, and he frequently balances his need to do well in school with his need to get his school work done quickly so that he can go do something else, particularly athletic activities. This is not to say that he ignores his school work—on the contrary, he often receives superlative marks—but rather

that the school work is not an end in itself, and he gives it the attention he needs to receive good marks.

**Marianne.** Marianne is a college prep student who will be moving up to Honors Language Arts in eighth grade. Marianne has developed a close friendship with Alexa, although her gregariousness seems to extend to every other student in the classroom as well. Marianne is a capable writer, although she does not possess the same syntactic flexibility as some of the other students in this study, and she does not engage with writing in much of her free time. However, she is comfortable with writing, and does not show an aversion to the act of writing whenever she is called upon to do it.

**Nick.** Nick is a quiet student in Emily's college prep class who excels at completing work despite the circumstances around him. No matter how disruptive a student next to him may be, he is always capable of focusing on his work. This is not to say that he does not engage with other students; in fact, he talks with other students regularly. But, like Don, he talks with other students in ways that do not violate the norms of classroom activity.

**Alexis.** Alexis is another honors-bound student in the college prep Language Arts class. Alexis is normally quiet throughout the class period, speaking only with other students on an individual basis. She also occasionally calls over Emily to discuss problems with her one-on-one. While Alexis does not hesitate to participate in large class discussions when called upon, she often does not volunteer of her own accord. Despite this reticence to speak aloud, however, Alexis has been successful in a great deal of the writing tasks that she has taken up throughout the school year.

**Clarence.** Clarence is a hardworking student in Emily's class. Clarence has a slight learning disability and sometimes struggles with classroom assignments, but he struggles

well, earning himself around a B or C average most of the time. He has a good relationship with Emily, and although he has many friends around the classroom, he has minimal issues staying focused. Clarence's friends and his own wandering attention frequently lead him to miss the key instructions for in-class assignments, but he is not shy about speaking with Emily to get the proper instructions that will allow him to accomplish the task.

### **Identifying and Tracing Realities**

The grounded theory approach detailed above was applied to the classroom actions of Emily's 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> period classes. The note-taking and coding procedures allowed me to reach what, to my eye, seemed to be the constantly reproduced realities of both student and teacher across the school year.

The memo writing and diagramming that I described helped me not only follow the realities of Emily and her students but put those realities into dialogue with the research reality that I was attempting to construct through the theoretical framework I identified in chapter two. In short, the grounded theory methodology provided space for both identifying realities and putting them into dialogue with one another.

The grounded theory methodology was helped by the variety of data collection methods that are present throughout the study: classroom events and student/teacher interpretations of those events can be triangulated through field notes, observational notes, interviews, video, and document collection. Coding each of these records creates a rich set of understandings of what happens in the classroom, and provides more easily-identifiable changes in reality perceptions that this work is attempting to track. The activity of the classroom that is identified in the various documents I have collected serves as a branching-off point for identifying and explaining the complex, permeable, and fragile realities that are

constantly made, remade, and refined by actors in different positions in the classroom throughout the school year.

### **Aligning Methodology, Theory, and Findings**

In order to organize the rich set of data that I have and present this in a more careful and pointed manner to the reader, I have opted to lay out an approach to looking at selected (and contextualized) slices of classroom activity that indicate changes in writing activity over time, and connect those changes to larger social and historical structures through my coding. However, in order to bring forward the answers to the research questions I posed in chapter one, I also need to show, in some way, the chains of situations that connect one moment of writing activity to another. In order to do this, I have constructed a rather unusual approach to presenting my work—and, along with that presentation, further analysis—which I discuss in depth in chapter four.

Detailing my organization of this material in the subsequent chapter will, I hope, make the empirical grounding of this work more straightforward, and multiply the effects of its findings. The narrow slices of life that I intend to present are, as will be seen in chapter four, not selected at random but selected logically based on the interpretation of the data at hand from the methods and theoretical framework established. Through my organization of the presentation of time and space, I hope to show the richness of classroom activity and of the data that I have collected and organized while, at the same time, making it clear and easy for the reader to sift through that immense amount of data in order to trace the facts that provide answers to the research questions identified in chapter one.



## **Chapter Four: Reconstructing Densely Textured Totalities**

The complex methodology described in the prior chapter is difficult to present but necessary to capture the complexity of how students' writing activity develops over time. This chapter provides an approach for both organizing the coding process described above and limiting the analysis to clear changes in writing activity over time in students. What follows is a way to carve through the understandings of the classroom that emerged from the GT analysis above and discover the individuated understandings of writing that develop into patterns of writing for students over time.

### **A Practical Rationale for Multiple Exposures**

The previous three chapters presented the research questions, indicated a gap in existing literature that needed to be addressed in order to answer those questions, and constructed a theoretical framework and methodology for answering those questions. In carrying out this methodology, I was, like many qualitative researchers, inundated with a great many records to sift through, and struggled to determine how to present the vivid detail that seemed so pertinent to exploring the phenomena that I found. Grounded theory, as described in chapter three, made it easier for me to explore this mass of data, but the problem of presenting it in a coherent manner that identifies individuated writing activity development remained.

To resolve this issue, I turned to Prior's (1998) concept of "multiple exposures" (p. 35). In his exploration of writing tasks in a seminar course, Prior "came to understand [writing assignments] historically, as a discursive cycle triggered by the assignment and culminating in a final graded paper" (p. 36). Furthermore, Prior found "multiple perspectives on those tasks" (p. 36). Prior (1998) connects this finding to the work of Flower, et al.

(1990), who found that “students not only produced quite different texts, but that those texts in effect represented different underlying representations of the task” (p. 36). In order to get at those different representations, to capture how “the synoptic image of a writing task multiplies and fragments along many dimensions, not just representation of the task, and for many reasons, not just students’ prior experience of school writing,” (p. 37) Prior explores the seminar he studies through “eight, overlain exposures of writing tasks” (p. 37). This allows him, he claims, to present real writing tasks “in their densely textured totality” (p. 37).

As helpful as Prior’s individual exposures were for him, however, applying them directly to my own situation proved complicated, since I was dealing with different writing circumstances and a differently oriented research project. However, using exposures to, as Prior put it, “set the stage” for a theoretically-informed analysis has allowed me to organize the various circumstances during which writing occurred in Emily’s classroom, as well as more carefully frame the theoretical implications that I have found for the reader. Each of these exposures can link the activity in a given literate act to others through intertextual connections, community values, and/or genre set, genre system, and activity system connections that are identified through grounded theory coding.

In order to fully fit my own research agenda and frame the complexity of literate acts for the reader, I have taken Prior’s use of exposures and reshaped them to apply to momentary literate acts. Prior used exposures to trace texts across time, something that revealed a great deal about trajectories of writing encounters and development. However, the exposures I use converge on one moment of time (which can themselves be of varying duration), and each exposure—with the help of the codes established via grounded theory

analysis—is able to peel away one complex set of relationships at a time from that moment to reveal the incredible complexity of literate acts, their antecedents, and their consequences.

In order to organize my data and create a clear path for the reader, I have, following Prior's (1998) concept of multiple exposures, organized my findings in ways that (1) present the richness of detail without overwhelming the reader and (2) avoid the problem of cherry picking data from a rich set of qualitative research experiences. Toward this end, I present a model of multiple exposures that will guide the presentation of my findings in the following chapters.

The use of exposures, then, serves a practical utility: it allows for the contextualized presentation of information without overwhelming the reader. The reader is able to extract salient points from a given exposure and, at the same time, not lose the complex and important connections that this exposure has with the rest of the social experience of the event's totality.

### **The Theoretical Alignments of Multiple Exposures**

The problem of exposures, or layers, is that it conflicts with the dominant metaphor of time that I have used throughout this work. As I indicated in chapter one, however, the metaphor of space helps me, as the researcher, expand my gaze as I look at specific situations within the ebb and flow of classroom activity. Within moments of space and time, participants shape their worlds with and for one another through the use of talk, tools, and texts, and the exposures allow me to peel away different perspectives at different times and see how various actors in a given situation are making sense of the world around them.

This is not to say that the elements within each exposure (and the overlapping nature of the exposures) do not communicate the world that the research subjects encounter, because

they do. However, the description of this world through the exposures is not aligned, necessarily, to the world that the students experience. Instead, the exposures serve as a research tool that also takes into account, in some ways, the realities that the students and teacher hold.

The exposures detailed below allow the reader to bridge the gap between the understandings and expectations of the researcher and the understandings and expectations of the research subjects. These exposures tend to overlap the understandings of both: they point out how students and teachers make sense of their classroom world over time, but they do not subordinate the researcher's position in that presentation. Instead, the views of both the researcher and participant are co-present in this model.

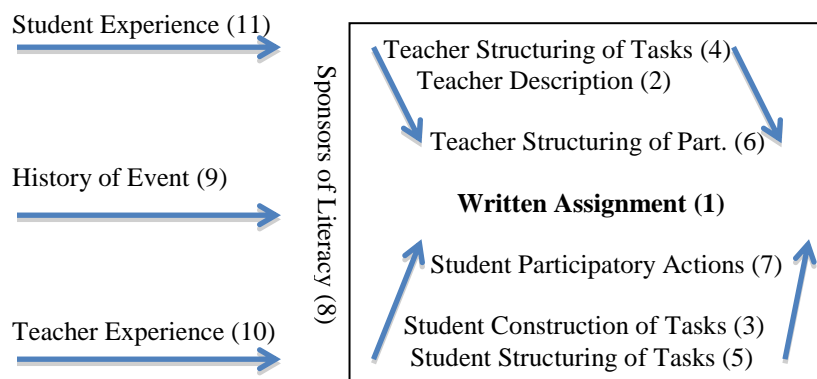
**Figure 4.1: Multiple Exposures of Classroom Activity**

<b>Literate Act: Identified, Described, and Bound by Exposures</b>	
Exposure 1	Written Assignment
Exposure 2	Teacher Description
Exposure 3	Student Construction of Task
Exposure 4	Teacher Structuring of Task
Exposure 5	Student Structuring of Task
Exposure 6	Teacher Structuring of Participation
Exposure 7	Student Participative Actions
Exposure 8	Sponsors of Literacy
Exposure 9	Historicizing the Event
Exposure 10	Teacher Experience
Exposure 11	Student Experience

The exposures presented in Figure 4.1 both constitute and bound the literate acts of students: students use the tools, talk, and text found in each exposure to create literate act boundaries that allow them to make sense of what is going on around them. But although these exposures provide the boundaries of a given literate act, they also provide the threads that lead each literate act to other literate acts, as well as the distantiated social pressures that contribute to the construction of certain kinds of literate acts.

The literate act, then, cannot be thought of as an entity separate from the eleven exposures. In fact, the exposures are merely slices taken away from the larger snapshot of the literate act. The exposures act as slides that, when pulled out, carry with them specific talk, tools, and texts that are linked, in some way, with the topic of the exposures.

**Figure 4.2: The Timeliness of Exposures**

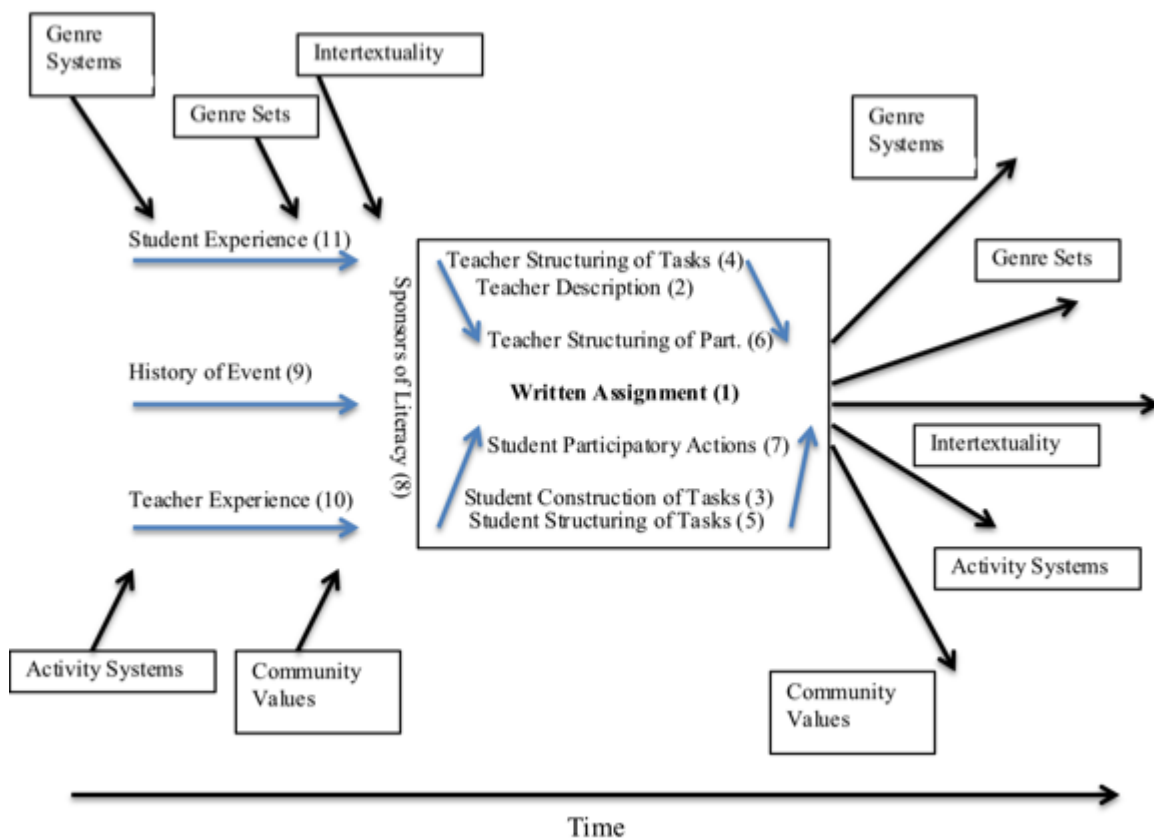


I refer to these as “exposures” following Prior’s lead because each represents a layer in the complex snapshot of activity that I have taken. When overlain together, these exposures add up to the “densely textured totality” of the literate act. As Figure 4.2 indicates, the interaction of time among these exposures is actually quite complex. Each exposure reaches back into particular histories of particular individuals, which casts each exposure backward and forward in time in very peculiar ways. The model presented in Figure 4.2 takes that time into account, and takes into particular account the ways that the exposures tend to work with one another. For example, the history of a given teacher’s experience will be filtered into the classroom through the teacher’s decisions about structuring activity and describing that structured activity. This is not to say that the exposures themselves cannot be separated, because they can, but rather that, when assembled into a single, densely textured

moment, these exposures will have a powerful impact on one another. The dominos of exposures that I have identified tend to fall in a very particular manner.

These exposures also are able to show that literate acts work in concert with one another, occur in chains, and have various kinds of material connections among one another. Figure 4.3 indicates the various kinds of material connections that occurs among literate acts, and situates those exposures and material connections along a time line.

**Figure 4.3: The Material Connections among Exposures and Literate Acts**



In the above figure, material connections among exposures and literate acts are shown both influencing the construction of a literate act and carrying that literate act, in many ways, into future literate acts. These materialist elements are not the only ways that literate acts carry across time, but they are, indeed, one set of ways in which it can happen. Figure 4.3 is

rather simplistic, and does not show the mediating influence that a literate act can have on genre systems, genre sets, activity systems, intertextuality, and community values, but the mediating influence, as will be shown below, is definitely present. At the heart of every literate act is an active agent using alphanumeric text toward a goal, and that work of transforming text always acts as a mediating influence on the material connections that spring into and out of that moment. As a literate act falls away from the present and recedes its way into the past, the literate act becomes part of exposures 9, 10, and 11 as shown on Figures 4.2 and 4.3, while the materialist connections and links among exposures pull the actor forward into the next literate act that needs to be accomplished.

### **Multiple Exposures**

The many, varied kinds of data I have—observations, interviews, documents, video—allow me to paint what Prior (1998) refers to as the “densely textured totality” of the classroom (p. 37). He argues that “a richer image of writing in the academy emerges when participants’ discourses and the theoretical frameworks interanimate one another” (p. 37), and introduces eight “exposures” that, when overlain, captures how “a writing task multiplies and fragments along many dimensions” (p. 37: the writing tasks as texts, the professor’s task representations, making and remaking the assignments, student representations of instructor’s tasks, the ambiguity of drafts, task negotiations, situating the writing tasks in student projects, and responding to students’ final, written texts. These eight exposures were powerful drivers in Prior’s sociohistorical project.

I have identified eleven different ways in which the elements of a given segment of class can be examined. These patterns emerged and have been refined through the GT data collection that I explain in chapter three. In this section, I identify and explain what separates

one exposure from another. I will also discuss how the exposures reveal various kinds of facts that work together to create, again, a densely textured totality of experience for participants.

**Exposure 1: Written assignment.** This first exposure explores the written text that students and teachers encounter in a given act of writing. This is different from the description that the teacher gives (Exposure 2) or the presence of other texts (Exposure 8) that drive the shaping of this written text in that it is a present, coherent entity in the classroom that both students and teachers make meaning of. The representation of this written assignment may be far different from the writing that students actually do, but being able to trace both only this exposure and the changes to this exposure can reveal the presence of sponsorship conflict in Exposure 8. It answers the question, “what writing does this document ask students to do?” It bounds the literate act within specific writing demands.

**Exposure 2: Teacher description.** This exposure is a reference to Emily’s description of a writing task—again, in the classroom. Much like Exposure 1, this exposure is limited to what happens inside of the classroom. What Emily says about a writing task in an interview falls under a different exposure (Exposure 10). Emily’s teacher descriptions are made through spoken interactions with students, both as a class and one-on-one (although not all one-on-one interactions are caught). Teacher descriptions can also occur via email or EDU comments, although this has been a less frequent occurrence. It answers the question “How does the teacher make sense of this assignment to students?” This exposure further refines what students must do with their literate acts by limiting the possibilities of what should happen on the page.



**Exposure 3: Student construction of task.** This exposure is student verbalizations of a given writing tasks to either Emily or other students. This occurred both during interactions with other students and teachers face-to-face and, like Exposure 2, via email, EDU comment, or blog entries. It answers the question “How do students make sense of both this assignment and the teacher’s instructions?”

While students do always construct the task, their constructions are not always verbalized, and those verbalizations are not always within easy reach of a microphone. However, when present, student constructions of task allow for a clear view into how students have understood the activity, and how they shift their understandings in light of the actions of others. The way that the demands of the assignment are perceived by the student further limits the possibilities of literate action.

**Exposure 4: Teacher structuring of task.** This exposure explores not how the teacher describes the task but rather the tools that the teacher uses to structure it: paper, iPads, texts, and material shown on the board or TV screen are just a few examples. This is different from Exposure 2 in that the teacher’s interpretations are not considered, and it is different from Exposure 8 because the history of the sponsors of literacy are not considered. It answers the question “What tools are provided by the teacher to accomplish this task?” This exposure also places additional structure on the literate act—what kinds of tools are accessible, when are they accessible, and to what extent are they accessible in order to accomplish a given task?

**Exposure 5: Student structuring of task.** This exposure explores how the students take up the tools offered (or not offered) to them in order to complete the assignment or some other kind of literate act. It answers the question “What available tools do students take up,

and how do they use them?” Just as Exposure 3 limited the possibilities presented in Exposure 2, so too does this exposure limit the possibilities bound in Exposure 4.

Students take up a great many tools in a given class period, so the focus of this exposure is not what students take up generally but rather what they take up to complete their task (or, sometimes, to attempt to complete their task). This exposure also explores how students use the tools that they take up. Students may not necessarily use a tool assigned by a teacher in the way that the teacher intended. This happened in Emily’s classroom several times. More frequent, however, is the possibility that the student will take up a tool as directed for part of the time, then move on to do something else with it after the task is complete. This back-and-forth between socially sanctioned and socially unsanctioned activity served to be an interesting development as student growth in writing was analyzed.

**Exposure 6: Teacher structuring of participation.** This exposure explores how student interactions with the teacher and each other are structured by teacher activity. This is different from the teacher structuring of task in that it considers both the historical structure of the classroom as well as the structure of the individual activities. It answers the question “What opportunities for participation are presented to students in this activity?” The participative element of the class is another bounding element, and reveals the avenues for action that students are able to take.

**Exposure 7: Student participative actions.** Exposure 7 differs from Exposure 5 in that it involves the specific activities of the student, not the way in which tools are taken up. Instead of exploring what tools students take them up and what they do with them, this exposure explores the ways in which students use those tools in order to enact (or not) their participative opportunities. It answers the question “How do students take up their presented

opportunities for participation?” This bounds literate acts by what students specifically do, how they make sense of the world around them and gear it for action.

**Exposure 8: Sponsors of literacy.** This exposure traces the influence of various literate act opportunities out of the classroom and into other distant, localized sponsors of literacy. Note that this exposure does not trace the shaping and alignment of such sponsors but rather the specific sponsors themselves, their demands, and their immediate appearance in the classroom. It answers the question “What sponsoring agents are benefiting from the literate acts performed in this classroom?” Tracing influences of other sites on the locality of the classroom both defines what the “local” is while also limiting what kinds of literate action is occurring within that locality.

**Exposure 9: Historicizing the event.** This exposure situates the classroom event in the history of the classroom, which can also be traced through Exposure 8 to large-scale histories of schooling. Events happen within a given intersubjective history that students and teachers may or may not recognize as an existing resource in future activities. This exposure traces that intersubjective history and indicates awareness on behalf of participants to doing so. It also traces the event forward, since records exist on both sides of the event. This exposure answers the question “How does this event contribute to the developing norms of classroom interaction and subsequent learning?” It bounds the literate act within the history of classroom activities.

**Exposure 10: Teacher experience.** This exposure situates the event in the experiences of the teacher. While Exposure 8 traces the sponsors of literacy present in the event, this exposure puts those sponsors together as seen through the eyes of the teacher, traces sponsorshaping acts, and follows through that sponsorshaping to perceived results,

expectations, and future decisionmaking about both curricula and students. It answers the question “How and why did the teacher construct this event in this way, and what did she take away from it?” This exposure bounds the literate acts of the student within the intentions of the teacher’s structuring of the activity.

**Exposure 11: Student experience.** This exposure explores the ways in which students experience the event under examination. While Exposure 9 takes into account the historical background of the *classroom*, this exposure explores the historical background of the *student*, to the extent that the history is able to be tapped. This also includes personal interpretations of events within the classroom, again to the extent that it can be ascertained. It answers the question “How and why did students experience this event in this way, and what did he or she take away from it?” This exposure bounds the literate acts of the student within the intentions of the student’s own action.

### **Drawing Exposures: Pulling Threads without Unraveling the Situation**

The purpose of the exposures selected for this study is threefold. First, these exposures help bound literate acts as they occur. Second, the exposures show the links between literate acts in one situation and literate acts in other situations. Third, these exposures can be drawn out of a given literate act to provide insight, through the codes established in chapter three, into the development of a given student’s writing activity over time.

The talk, tools, and texts of all exposures work together to bound the writing activity of students and teachers. The research subjects do not see the exposures as they are, even though the language used to describe the tools in them is based on the language of the students as gleaned from the GT analysis: rather, the exposures are ways of pulling out the

needed talk, tools, and texts to answer the provided research question. If needed, each exposure can trace those talk, tools, and texts across locations, so that the influence of distanced places can be identified within Emily's classroom.

Each of these exposures acts like a different lens of magnification on a microscope, bringing certain elements to the fore, backgrounding others, and distorting the rest. However, when used purposefully and in order to create a better understanding of the complex social work that is writing activity, each of these exposures can both reveal a great deal individually and provide a more coherent picture when linked to one another. Chapter five selects moments, draws exposures, and blends those exposures together at times to provide the reader with an understanding of how this happens.

Since the exposures are situated in time (see Figure 4.3), however, drawing out different exposures is a good deal more complex than adjusting the magnification of a microscope. Care must be taken that the extracted exposures do not stretch out the talk, tools, and texts of any other exposures—in short, the extracted thread must not unravel the deeper meaning that the researcher doing the extracting is looking for. A student's decision of how to take up the participative opportunities presented to him by the teacher, for example, should not be stretched to explain the teacher's actual intentions: rather, a separate set of talk, tools, and texts (i.e., the teacher's instructions, her reaction to the individual student's decisions, and the activities of other students) will be called upon for that particular exposure. In order to avoid this, each exposure must be carefully contextualized, with all ties to other exposures accounted for and left intact.

Paying attention to the "cloth" that the elements in each exposure make up keep the analysis grounded in the contextualized realities in which they occur, but also allow for an

empirically rigorous approach to understanding each exposure in a replicable, aggregable way. In essence, the attention to the connections of each exposure makes the analysis of the exposure more powerful not just in itself, but in its connection to other exposures, other literate acts, and the wider understanding of how writing development occurs with these students over time.

### **Re-Constructing Literate Acts Through Exposures**

The exposures described above order the details within the codes and categories established through the methodology described in chapter three assist in the re-construction, from the researcher's perspective, of literate acts. Each of these exposures acts not only as a vehicle for exploring the talk, tools, and text in a given literate act performance, but also serves as a boundary of that act, showing—again, through talk, tools, and text—when the literate act has been completed, when the actor has moved on to another literate act in the chain. Exposures both inform and bound literate acts that occur for the researcher.

Presenting each literate act through the exposures also makes the boundaries of the literate act as the actor in the situation sees it easier to identify. Each exposure, of course, has its own talk, tools, and texts involved with it, but it is in the perceived take-up of these tools that we can identify how student writers see the classroom that they constitute. When the talk, tools, and text change—or when the way that they are taken up changes—we can see an end of one literate act and the start of another; furthermore, we can see how the actors in the situation adjust to that change in literate act.

The selection of exposures and the bounding of activity is, really, a reconstruction of a literate act performance that has already been performed and now exists in the realm of past experience of the actors under study. The collection of records that I have allows me, to use

my methodological decisions to explore that past and reconstruct it for a better understanding of what happened through the lenses of various realities. The past experience of a student or teacher can be explored as it occurred, and these findings can be used as a guide when attempting to understand the literate act that occurs slightly forward in time, but still in the past experience of the student or teacher. In short, considering the tracing of literate acts as a trip into the past allows us to better understand the different ways in which we can take up a given literate act, and the power that our understanding of that literate act has for the future actions of students. We can see the rich possibilities for understanding a given literate act, and—through our study of the future actions of these students—we can see what of those rich possibilities were taken up and understood.

Seeing the literate acts as travel through time is a different way of experiencing these findings than some other methodological positions. In my view, these other methodological positions would ignore the ramifications that past literate acts have on future literate acts, as well as the ways in which future intentions can impact the acts of the past.

The multiple exposures provided above provide a densely textured description of each literate act that is analyzed. Furthermore, this densely textured totality acts as a merging point for the different kinds of perspectives that occur in any given moment of literate act performance. Each element in a given situation—be it talk, tools, or text—is recognized and used in a different way by different actors in a situation in order to accomplish a given goal. However, although the reality produced through various exposures may vary, they do—when aligned together—provide the researcher with an understanding of how different kinds of realities work together to accomplish tasks. Furthermore, the exposures of literate acts provide an understanding of how realities work in tandem to

support one another: the interpretations of acts that occur in one reality lead to the creation of social facts that influence the realities of others.

The exposures used in this analysis both reconstruct literate acts, bound them, and make clear for the reader how the actor performing the literate act saw opportunities for action *in situ*. This kind of tracing both shows the “densely textured totality” (Prior, 1998, p. 37) of literate acts and the way that densely textured totality is recognized and acted upon.

### **Connecting Literate Acts Through Exposures**

The exposures provided do more than simply bound literate acts: through their very bounding power, they provided the traces that link one literate act to another. Students and teachers who engage in literate acts call forward similar talk, tools, and texts for similar kinds of writing, and the exposures above provide detail on how the talk, tools, and texts are organized within given moments of writing. The exposures, in fact, reveal changes and similarities in text, talk, and tool use over time.

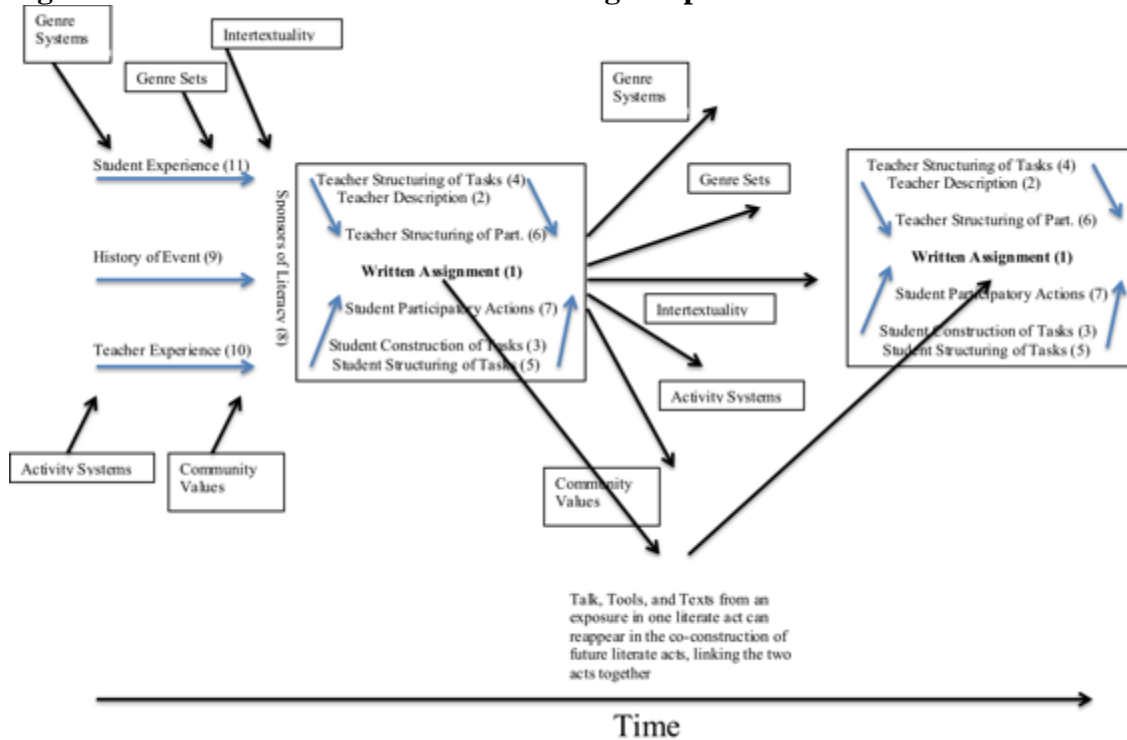
Consider, for example, Emily’s decision to assign her students regular writing in their “Writer’s Notebooks.” The assignment that Emily gives to her students is largely the same every time: students select one of four options (i.e., opinion, creative, informative, or a “pulling the week together” option), and write a half-page entry in that format. These writing assignments remained consistent throughout the year: the only change that occurred was the addition of “Writing Territories,” or a list of topic ideas that students kept with them to generate ideas for each entry.

As students came to engage in literate acts for their “OpTIC” writing, then, the written assignment (or Exposure 1) remained the same. All of the talk, tools, and text of the



other exposures may vary, and vary widely, but the written assignment goes unchanged from one literate act to the next across the school year. This is represented in the figure below.

**Figure 4.4: Literate Act Connections Through Exposures**



Of course, this is a simplified and generalized example, as any given literate act may carry several exposures' talk, tools, and texts from earlier literate acts. However, the figure accurately shows a literate act in one moment of space and time linking, via exposures, to another literate act at a future moment of space and time, even if that similarity is not talked into recognition via the five identified material connections.

As can be seen in the figure, each literate act has within it specific talk, tools, and texts. These elements do not remain in a single, specific literate act but spread along many literate acts, which make them possible to chain together through the exposures provided. If two literate acts draw the same or similar uses of talk, tools, and text in a given exposure, the possibilities of a link between the two exposures exist. Furthermore, it is possible, through

the careful analysis of multiple exposures, to find connections across more than one exposure, which would further reinforce the connections among given literate acts.

Of course, connecting a literate act to another literate act through exposures does not necessarily indicate how an individual in those literate acts will see the two literate acts as relating to one another, although it may. Because of this, the use of connecting literate acts to one another through exposures is not a surefire way to identify important connections according to the specific actors in a given situation; it may, instead, simply indicate a thread of connections that the actor him or herself has not yet consciously attended to. But the exposures themselves can still act as a single piece of evidence that can be built upon for drawing connections across literate acts. Using material connections and the verbalized connections in student interviews as other points of data, the exposures can point the way toward connections across literate acts.

The “material connections” mentioned above are seen from a different perspective than the expansion of material discussions addressed below. Here, each material link is seen not as a link in a larger system or chain but as a constitutive element of a given exposure in a given situation that is used again in future literate acts. The materials used in each literate act are shown through the actors within the given situation. Below, the material connections teased out indicate the connections from a distanced, systemic point of view.

These material connections link up through their repetitive use: as people in similar situations take up tools, talk, and text through exposures in similar ways, links are established that indicate the realities that those people see.

This section has shown, with an example, how the exposures used to bound literate acts can serve a second purpose by identifying the connections among literate acts separated

by space and/or time. This richness has also brought to the fore a clearer understanding of how people engaged in the act of writing move from one literate act into another. This is particularly powerful in detailing how writing activity changes over time in similar situations when new information or activity is taken up by the actor in the situation. However, the very continuity that this approach brings with it implies an element of unchangingness: the idea that context, or person, or activity remains whole and unchanged in some way. In order to emphasize the dynamic interactions between context, actor, and activity, I draw out, in the next section, the powerful material connections that highlight the instability inherent in all three, and—at times—contribute to the changes in writing activity.

### **Identifying Material Connections in Chains of Literate Acts**

The key material connections that spring out of every literate act analyzed are genre sets, genre systems, activity systems, intertextuality, and community values. These five material connections provide a richly detailed series of interactive links among the literate acts analyzed. Each of these connections provides a line of connection among literate acts while also providing indications of change in time, space, and intention.

To be sure, elements from each of these five material connections may be (1) part of or (2) constituted by the exposures of each literate act. However, each of these connections, when kept within the careful confines of a specific exposure, remains oriented toward the subject's view of the situation. The material connections, however, may extend beyond the perceptions of the subject, and therefore these methods of tracing those material connections becomes important. It allows the researcher to see what kinds of connections exist in the *researcher's* reality, based upon the researcher's own incorrigible propositions. The exposures described above link the researcher's reality to the subject's, but the subject's

reality seems, in those exposures, to hold sway, and for a good reason: it is important not to know just what avenues of writing activity development are available, but what seems available to the subject, and what is taken up. However, in order to know *why* these realities are taken up, and why others are not taken up, it is necessary to trace out the avenues of connections that often go unnoticed by the actors in a given situation. It may also more fully indicate why certain activities are structured the way that they are, and why others fail to occur at all.

Perhaps primary in the material connections among literate acts is intertextuality, since it is embedded in the other material connections as well. I define intertextuality according to Bazerman (2004), which itself evolves from the work of Volosinov (1928) and, to a lesser extent, Bakhtin (1929). The issue of intertextuality brings with it not only a connection from one written or spoken moment to another but an element of re-media-tion (Prior & Shipka, 2003), in that the reproduction of intertextual references allows the writer or speaker to infuse his or her own sense of the reference with it.

These intertextual connections exist within what Devitt (1991) and later Bazerman (2004) refer to as “genre sets,” or “the collection of types of texts someone in a particular role is likely to produce” (Bazerman, 2004, p. 13). Devitt (1991), in her study of the intertextual elements of tax accounting, argues that “each genre [in a genre set] reflects a different rhetorical situation which in turn reflects a different combination of circumstances” (p. 339-340), with all circumstances experienced by someone in a given role. A student in a given class, a teacher teaching that given class, and the principal running the school within which that class is happening all work with specific genre sets: they produce certain kinds of texts that allow them to participate in society in their particular roles. Tracing out these sets

allows literate acts to be more carefully linked together, or more carefully articulated when that link is missing.

The most effective element of the concept of genre sets is its generalizeability: since there are over thirty students in each classroom, it becomes clear, over time, what kinds of genres are available to the students, what they do on the regular basis, and what they *should* do at specific points of space and time. By tracing the kinds of writing that all students in the class are completing, it becomes easier to point out when a particular student engages in a different kind of genre set, when he or she alters her ways of going about participating in the larger set of interacting genres of which he or she is a part. Changes in a genre set indicate changes in literate act performance, which allows this study to more easily track the ways in which literate acts grow and change over time.

These genre sets are constitutive elements in genre systems (Bazerman, 2004), which are “comprised of the several genre sets of people working together in an organized way, plus the patterned relations in the production, flow, and use of these documents. A genre system captures the regular sequences of how one genre follows another in the typical communication flows of a group of people” (p. 13). The genre systems provide an explanation for how the writing of different people in the same location working on related products communicate with one another through the written word. Genre sets, working together, create genre systems.

These genre systems are part of another, much larger set of systems: activity systems. “In defining the system of genres people engage in,” writes Bazerman (2004, p. 14), “you also identify a framework which organizes their work, attention, and accomplishment. In some situations spoken genres dominate, but as you move up the educational ladder and into

the professional world, the system of written genres become especially important.” At the level of activity, the sets and systems of genres are viewed as part of the actions of human beings working in some kind of cooperation in order to accomplish goals and live their lives.

Genre sets, genre systems, and systems of activity represent the connections among people, texts, and activity at a high altitude: they present a bird’s-eye view of what social orders are (re)produced when people engage with certain people through certain texts in certain ways. Because human activity in one time and place often, later, creates the exigency for activity in another time and place, tracing genre sets, genre systems, and activity systems out in detail can also identify links among literate act performances. These links may not be visible to the actor engaged in these literate acts, or may be visible but unacknowledged. However, through the framing of the researcher, it can be shown that these connections do, in fact, exist, and that these connections are important connections in the continual renewal, refinement, and remediation of society.

The genre sets, genre systems, and activity systems also represent a larger form of connections than the intertextual connections discussed above. Intertextual tracing involves the tracing of words and phrases across documents and over time, which is an important way of identifying how concepts carry over from one situation to another. With genre sets, genre systems, and activity systems, however, one can look at wider connections, and identify the effects of one document—intertextual features or no—on other documents, people, and activity. Thus, the wider view offered by these concepts offers a wider set of visible connections among sites of literate activity.

A final connection among sites of literate acts is community values. These values are really stances on writing, the writing process, and the final written word that are established

within a given community—in this case, the classroom. These values may be encompassed in any of the above four material connections, but they also represent a unique source of connections that overlap the material links above. A community value may be verbalized through discussion, work its way into a written genre, shape a future genre of writing in a specific way, and influence how both student and teacher go about taking up that writing in the future. Community values weave in and out of different material connections while still remaining, for the purposes of this research, its own material string of connections. Community values can be thought of as multi-material connections.

Each of the material connections discussed above present a different but important link among literate acts. The exposures identified above present more connections, but these material connections go beyond the exposures to indicate, from a researcher's perspective, the larger systemic connections among moments of literate activity. Intertextuality and community values present connections among sites that carry on through genre sets, genre systems, and systems of activity. These larger sets and systems, in turn, provide detail about the larger social order that the literate acts the students perform contribute to reproducing across given times and spaces.

These material connections are traced out through careful attention to the larger systems of which given literate acts are part. The coding methodology developed in chapter three provides clear indications of links among activity, talk, tools, and texts, and these codes provided starting points for teasing out genre sets, genre systems, activity systems, intertextuality, and community values. The field notes and observational notes that I constructed when observing Emily's classroom made (1) the kinds of writing that students had to do and (2) how that writing was connected with the writing that Emily had to do rather

clear. Emily provided the assignment sheets and writing aids that she constructed, the students completed the assignments and used the writing aids, and turned finished products back into Emily for a grade.

Of course, the genre sets and systems were not quite so straightforward throughout: Emily, in fact, did a great deal of behind-the-scenes writing, and Emily's students sometimes engaged in informal genres of writing that appear invisible in the final products that they turn in. Toward this end, my document collection and interviews proved helpful in identifying, in a more all-encompassing manner, the genre sets and systems at work in and for Emily's classroom.

The systems of activity, for the most part, could be traced out through the observational notes, field notes, and video data. Sometimes this activity carried outside of the classroom, and some of this activity was captured via interviews and document collection. Within these systems of activity, the intertextual connections among literate acts and the community values that arose throughout the school year could be traced through collected documents. Community values—particularly tacit community values—could be traced through the activities of students and teacher, in particular the activity of students as they went about the act of writing. Furthermore, I was able to have students and teacher articulate particular values through appropriate interview questions.

My attempts to trace the activity system of the classroom, the genre sets and systems that students and teacher engaged in, and the community values present in the classroom with regard to writing were ongoing throughout my data collection process, although I did not reach stable activity system, genre set, genre system, and community value descriptions until well after data collection was complete. These descriptions were helpful in tracing the



impact of different literate acts on one another, particularly when these literate acts were not connected clearly by a specific chain of literate action or a set of reproduced circumstances. The intertextual connections were marked when identified during the detailing of exposures, and sought out in the tracing of specific literate acts. Unlike the other four material connections, however, a specific, sustained search of intertextual connections was not performed throughout the process of data collection.

These material connections among literate acts more deeply contextualize those literate acts, and privilege the importance of time and space in the production of the written word as students go about developing as writers. Furthermore, these material connections provide a point of view that is more researcher-based than participant-based, since they indicate connections that, while visible by the individual performing the literate act, may be seen and understood in a quite different way. These five material connections work well with the already-established exposures to provide avenues for interactions among researcher and participant perspectives.

### **Literate Act and Exposure Selection Process**

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the tracing of literate acts and the detailing of multiple layers of exposures has created a rich—and nearly overwhelming—collection of details from which useful takeaways become difficult to see. However, there is also the need—in order to more carefully construct a replicable program of research—to avoid the construction of anecdotal evidence. While the exposures above create a clear set of exposures that the reader could follow in a given literate act, providing evidence for every literate act observed would be overwhelming and difficult to follow. In this section, then, I

identify a selection process that is both empirically rigorous and attentive to the changing circumstances of writing activity as the students performed it throughout the year.

The most important element of this process is the level of data that went into its collection. The coding process developed in chapter three allowed me to clearly follow the complexities of the interactive realities that coexisted in Emily's classroom, but the coding methodology as a whole was not an effective agent in the selection of specific moments of literate action.

In order to identify specific moments of literate action, I began taking passes at surveying the different kinds of writing that happened in the classroom. This was made easier through the coding process I had already developed, but I added more contextualized information to those codes in order to get a feel for the extent of the writing and its level of privilege in the classroom. Both high-privilege and low-privilege writing are important for this study, but I marked both in order to see the relationship between the two.

Once I had a collection of different kinds of writing that the students engaged in throughout the year, I began looking for specific moments of that writing in action: what moments of writing activity were thrown into sharp relief by video, interview, documentary evidence, or field notes / observational notes? This provided me with a wealth of writing events that I could describe in considerable detail. However, the moments that I selected for presentation had to not only clearly present a given writing activity, but assist in the presentation of changes in subsequent (or prior) writing activity. Thus, the selection of a single literate act required the identification of multiple literate acts.

My coding process led me to many different kinds of writing, which I was able to trace to multiple acts of specific writing through several data points. During this entire

process, I leaned heavily toward identifying literate acts that could be seen in my notes, on video, and through written documents. However, due to the limitations of video tape and the sometimes-chaotic process of document collection, all of these data points are not necessarily possible for each of the literate acts that I had to explore. While the absence of some of this data does present occasional gaps and difficulties, I minimized this problem by limiting my data collection to points of writing growth that involved at least two sources of information. This prevented any of my findings from being one dimensional.

The literate act selection process is presented through the tables below. Using the different kinds of writing I identified through my coding as a guide, I searched for specific moments of writing that I could find in more than one location: notes, video, interview, and documents. Because I used my field notes for the selection of kinds of writing, I obviously was able to find at least one source for these kinds of writing. However, in Table 4.1, I present specific literate acts within each writing type (a generalized code of writing activity developed during my GT analysis) that involve more than one source of documentation. The subsequent tables are also intended to provide useful and clear examples of how the literate act selection process evolved. The types of documentation available are also included. Then, in Table 4.2, I present my narrowed literate act selection and the rationale behind the selection of each literate act. In Table 4.3, I present literate acts that were available but not taken up, and provide a rationale for not drawing on that particular literate act for in-depth analysis in the next chapter.

Each of the kinds of writing in the above table provides many avenues for tracing literate action. However, throughout the course of the school year, some kinds of writing become more privileged than others. Furthermore, some kinds of writing become subsumed

within larger kinds of writing, so that—even though the writing itself is not privileged—it becomes a powerful element in the construction of the kinds of writing that do matter. The kinds of writing that are particularly revealing about these interconnections involve what I, in chapter five, describe as “writing to organize” texts. These texts began the year with a high level of importance, as Emily took care to explain exactly to her students what was expected of them for each kind of writing. Oftentimes, in fact, students received considerable point values for their organizing activity (and, actually, the point values were consistent across the year, they were simply overshadowed by the point values of larger assignments later in the year). As the year wore on, however, these tools were pushed to the background as a starting point for larger kinds of writing assignments. But these assignments could not be completed successfully without the smaller kinds of writing, and so an orchestration of differently-valued kinds of writing arose in the class.

**Table 4.1: Triangulated Literate Acts within Writing Types**

Writing Type	Literate Acts	Sources of Data (in addition to Field and Observational Notes)		
		Int.	Video	Docs
Table of Contents	September 10, 2013			
	September 11, 2013			
	September 12, 2013			
	September 16, 2013		X	X
	September 30, 2013		X	X
	November 18, 2013			
Heading	September 12, 2013			
	September 16, 2013		X	X
	September 18, 2013		X	X
	September 23, 2013		X	X
	October 4, 2013			
	November 5, 2013			
	November 13, 2013		X	X
	November 15, 2013			
	November 18, 2013			
	December 5, 2013			
Highlighting / Annotating	September 12, 2013			

	September 18, 2013 October 2, 2013 October 25, 2013 November 15, 2013		X	
Summary	September 23, 2013 September 30, 2013 October 2, 2013 October 4, 2013 October 21, 2013 November 13, 2013 December 10, 2013		X X    X	X X

The writing type and literate act identified in this table shows the level of triangulation that each moment has. The list of sources of available data per literate act per student clears separates easily many potential literate acts that fail to be accounted for with a proper amount of data (defined as at least two points). It should be noted that this chart does not present any decisions about literate act use for analysis. Instead, Table 4.2 and Table 4.3 present the literate acts that were selected, the literate acts that were rejected, and the rationale for selections on both fronts.

**Table 4.2: Literate Act Selection and Rationale**

<b>Writing</b>	<b>Selected Literate Acts</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
Table of Contents	September 16	Extensive video available; clear directions by Emily; clear video of several TOC activities
Heading	September 16 September 18	Reinforcement of heading Clear video of several headings -RE: Both headings – early in the year / further evidence of text reorganization
Highlighting	September 18	Extensive, explicit directions from Emily
Summary	September 23 September 30	Explicit directions from Emily Multiple examples that relate easily to future summary examples

The separation of these two tables makes clear the differences between selected and non-selected literate acts. Literate acts that were not selected, generally, did not have the wide range of data sources that the selected literate acts did. While there may be some argument that a few of these literate acts could, in fact, be selected for the purposes of clarifying occasional points, their addition was not worth the weakening of the rigorous standards set in the initial selection process. The possible information these moments may have added to the emerging understanding of literate acts were, at best, tangential to the findings from the richly informed selected acts.

**Table 4.3: Non-Selected Literate Acts and Rationales**

<b>Writing</b>	<b>Non-Selected Literate Acts</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
Table of Contents	September 30	Video and documents show little to analyze
Heading	September 23	Heading only mentioned in passing – Emily moved on quickly
Highlighting	N/A	
Summary	November 13	Summary activity was extremely brief

It should be noted that non-selected literate acts can still provide information for a larger understanding of the development of literate activity over time: their weakness is in presenting a larger picture of literate act development in students. These acts, which are most often found wanting in the amount of material available for study, can provide more context to other literate acts, and, in that way, inform the data that are studied within other literate acts. These non-selected acts often serve as pieces of studied work during the scope sliding moments presented below. Even though these moments did not, in the end, qualify as literate acts with sufficient data for a full-fledged analysis, pieces of information from these carefully-documented moments could still be pulled from the available records.

The above process of literate act selection provides a replicable, contextually-informed path of honing in on appropriate literate acts that usefully inform the research questions presented. Even with this narrowing of literate acts, however, presenting the details of each exposure can provide an overwhelming amount of detail that confuses useful findings within each moment in a fog of densely textured totality. To avoid this, I will be, in the following chapters, pulling out specific exposures in order to highlight specific aspects of literate act performance that inform our understanding of the writing development of selected students.

This exposure selection method is based largely on the most prominent talk, text, and tool use for the actor in a given situation: once again, Merton's (1987) idea of "frog lungs" comes to mind: the exposures that do appear are easiest for the human eye to see, given the limitations of our current tools. By focusing on the moments that bring forward specific kinds of talk, tools, and text, I can more easily understand the complex literate world that the students engage in, as well as how they see that world. Of course, this use of a "natural microscope" does not necessarily indicate a full association with the realities that the students work with, but they often bring forward additional, previously unknown information that has pragmatic uses across different situations.

Following this literate act and exposure selection method, I have been able to (1) narrow down the number of literate acts that need to be observed to find answers to the research questions and (2) focus my analysis of each literate act to a limited number of exposures. Both of these selection methods help to bring to the fore the most prevalent aspects of a given literate act that best contribute to answers to the research questions without separating them from the tightly interwoven, contextualized reality of which they are a part.

These selection methods have enabled me to pull on the threads that contribute to various realities without allowing the larger context and meaning to fall apart.

For clarity's sake, I have broken my findings into two separate chapters, and I discuss the implications in a third chapter. In chapter five, I describe in some detail the writing environment within which the students wrote, describe the different types of writing that students completed, and show what that literate act development looks like in that context through several clear examples. In chapter six, I use this information to construct answers to the research questions I presented in chapter one. Chapter seven discusses the implications of these findings in detail, an emergent theory of the middle range of writing activity, and considers possible alterations of this study for future research.



## **Chapter Five: Emily's Classroom and Literate Act Development**

The previous two chapters have elaborated the research site, research participants, and methodological approach to resolving the research questions of this project through the theoretical framework provided in chapter two. In this chapter, I present the results of the analysis. This project examines literate activity on several levels (i.e., classroom, small groups, individual students) and from several different points of view (various students and their teacher). In order to present this vast swath of data in a clear, easy-to-follow manner, I have organized this chapter according to specificity level. First, I discuss Emily's classroom on a yearlong time scale: I show how her classroom unfolded, the tools that she used, and the way that she encouraged connections among them. Next, I discuss the day-to-day life in the classroom that students and Emily constructed together. Within the study of day-to-day life, I am able to identify different kinds of writing that students are asked to perform, as well as the different ways in which this writing is "counted" in Emily's classroom. This account of Emily's classroom (the yearlong development, day to day activity, and types of writing students engage in) identifies the expectations and understandings that developed within the classroom community during the school year.

These expectations and understandings developed through the interaction (both physical and spoken) of individuals in Emily's classroom throughout the year. While they often draw from resources that carry far beyond the classroom walls, each individual reinvention of the expectations and understandings of the classroom is a local event. I close this chapter with a description and analysis examples showing each of the purposes of writing identified throughout the year being taken up by individual students in ways that further their writing activity development. Specific, naturally microscopic moments in each

writing purpose have been chosen to provide the reader with a clear understanding of the ways in which these literate acts developed. These findings, when broken down, provide answers to the research questions listed in chapter one.

### **Emily's Classroom: The Progression of the School Year**

Emily's class moved through several units throughout the course of the school year. Each of these units was deliberately marked off by Emily in several ways. Primarily, this marking was accomplished through the use of the English section of students' school binders. Goodland Middle School asked all students to purchase a large, three-ring binder for the start of the school year. Students organized these binders by class, with each class getting a separate section. Emily's students, then, arrived in class with a section reserved for Language Arts in a three-ring binder. Emily took advantage of this opportunity by organizing her handouts (and leading the students' organization of the handouts) around this binder section.

First, students were provided, at the start of each unit, with a new Table of Contents sheet (see example below) and some introductory materials. Emily used this, as well as the process of collecting older Table of Contents packets, as a signal that the class was moving into a new set of activities with a new theme. As the class continued activities in the unit, they were given additional material to add to their Table of Contents. Once the unit came to a close—either with a benchmark exam or some other culminating activity—Emily had her students read through their sheets, highlight the key points, and write a short reflection on their learning on the back of the Table of Contents sheet. The students then removed all of their sheets from the English section of their binders, stapled them together, and handed them in for a grade. This reflective act not only signaled the end of a unit, but the start of a new

one, as students came to understand that this activity led them directly into the introduction for their next unit.

Emily's units varied widely in their length and amount of recorded sheets. Some units, in fact, required two separate packets with Table of Contents sheets in order to keep all of the writing organized. These Table of Contents sheets, as well as their organization, provides a clear pattern of the unit organization of Emily's classes throughout the school year. Each unit title represents a theme that tied all of the work that students completed in Emily's class together during that unit. Emily felt that the organization of units according to themes helped students make sense of the activities that they were completing, and gave the many, disparate activities that students completed some sort of direction throughout the course of a given unit.

Some assignments, of course, were persistent throughout the school year without reference to the unit themes. The Writer's notebooks, for example, always followed the same framework regardless of classroom activity. The "Do Now" activity was also structured in very similar ways throughout the year, rarely connecting to a unit theme. When a unit theme connection was brought in to a "Do Now" activity, it was a coincidental moment: Emily did not try to bring the theme of the "Do Now" activity into the unit activities.

The above description of the units and the Tables of Contents used to organize them outlines the way in which classroom writing activity was organized throughout the school year. This classroom writing activity, of course, was also tied to student activity as they attempted to participate meaningfully in the unfolding structure of class. The genred forms

of writing that students participated in also shaped their participation in many ways, as will be seen in the analysis of various literate acts below.

However, in addition to the genred spaces that influenced the writing in Emily's class, Emily's decisions about the time structures of activity played a role in the writing that students completed and how they went about completing it. In the section below, I tease out from my observations throughout the year a highly generalized organization of classroom activity. This generalized organization is not how the students perceived classroom lessons—instead, the students identified and built the progression of a class period through interaction with one another and the teacher—but considering how the classroom activity unfolded on a generalized level will assist in making sense of the progression of literate acts that are charted later in this chapter.

### **Activity in Emily's Classroom**

Activity in Emily's classroom is organized collaboratively around a series of timed activities. When students walk into the classroom at the start of the period, they can see a list of activities on the board directly ahead of them. They can also see, on the television screen above the board, the “Do Now” activity that they are to begin class with. This is normally an activity to build what Emily refers to as *sentence sense* among students, although students use the “Do Now” to copy tasks in their agenda at the start of each week. Regardless of the activity, however, Emily greets the class with a “Good morning” or “Good afternoon” once the bell rings, and gives students between three and four minutes to complete the activity. Emily uses a timer at the front of the room to track the time. Emily normally provides students with some guidance before starting the timer. When time expires, Emily checks on the progress of her students. Occasionally, she gives them an extra minute or two if they

need it. During most of the observations, however, students had completed the activity and were ready to move on.

After the students finish the “Do Now,” Emily reviews the “Do Now” activity with the students, calling on students either randomly or by taking volunteers. The number of volunteers that Emily takes varies with the complexity of the exercise and the problems that students have with it, although most “Do Now” activity reviews involved two to five students.

Once the “Do Now” was reviewed, Emily briefly presented the class objective and the schedule of events for the class. The discussion of lesson activities normally expanded into the larger assignments of which they were part. For example, a discussion of a writing activity that would turn into part of a larger blog writing assignment would lead to a discussion of the blog writing assignment in general. During this period, students often asked clarifying questions about assignment content, due dates, and specific requirements. Occasionally, students would also interject their own interests into the conversation, which Emily welcomed but also continually brought back to the review of classroom activities.

When Emily finished reviewing the tasks for the day, she engaged in what I coded as *desk control*, often by providing students with a *time structure*. Emily would tell students what they had to have out on their desks, and sometimes even where on their desks it needed to be. She would also give students a set amount of time to do this, often 42 seconds. 42 seconds is the usual amount of time (according to Emily) between the start of a pop song and its first chorus. Emily often played music during this time, and expected students to be prepared at the start of the chorus.

After the students completed their organizing activity, Emily began the next activity. These activities would vary widely, from reading to writing to watching video or even

moving around the room. However, whatever the activity was, Emily relied upon time structures, desk control, and the spatial organization of her classroom to direct student action.

Near the conclusion of class, Emily would often provide students with a *ticket out*, or a writing activity that encouraged students to reflect on their activities from the day's lesson. Exit tickets were not offered every lesson, and sometimes a planned exit ticket was scrapped from the lesson plan if Emily ran out of time.

The above description provides a general overview of how Emily's class operated in a given class period. While there were quite a few variations on the Do Now – Review – Desk Control – Activity – Exit Ticket format, the structure was present in some form throughout every observed lesson of the school year.

But the very act of looking back on Emily's classroom activity tends to bring forward the more recurrent structures in the classroom while obscuring the natural variation as these structures are reproduced over time. In fact, the variation itself is part and parcel of the familiar, reproduced structure as it accommodates new circumstances. The study of literate acts captures this variation and indicates how it can be used to make sense of the development of students as writers.

### **Layers of Writing**

Emily's students performed many different kinds of writing throughout the year: they wrote poems, essays, short stories, notes, calendar items, and much more. The coding of these different documents proved immense, particularly during the open coding phase. However, when I began paying attention to the ways in which students were taking up the writing that they were doing, a simpler pattern began to emerge. I looked at the actions that students were attempting to accomplish with their writing, and I saw a pattern of seven

different writing purposes that Emily had her students write for. These “purposes” are not references to the writing that students do but rather are indicative of the actions Emily is setting them up to accomplish. Furthermore, these activities are often co-present: a student may complete a single document that, in the end, serves several different purposes. For example, a student writing a blog entry may be “Writing to Participate” when completing a rough draft to prepare for discussion in class, but is also “Writing to Perform” for a grade when the final blog is handed in. However, in this example, the “Writing to Participate” is clearly privileged over the “Writing to Perform,” at least during the rough draft phase, by Emily’s structuring of classroom activity. This may later shift, but that shift will be evident in the interaction of classroom participants. The table below indicates the seven purposes of writing that students performed.

### 5.1: Purposes for Writing in Emily's Classroom

Purposes of Writing	Description	Examples
Organization	This is the kind of writing that helps students organize their writing or their preparation for future writing. Students engaged in writing to organize are not improving their writing, but rather organizing themselves for action.	Agenda  Binder Table of Contents  Headings
Preparation	Students engaged in writing to prepare are writing for future writing: that is, they are writing to make the orchestration of resources in the future easier to work with for a specific writing task. This is different from writing to organize in that the writing done here has a direct, material connection with the writing that will occur later.	Highlighting  Summary of a text  Note taking  Depth and Complexity question highlighting  Cornell Notes

Performance	Students who write to perform are writing for a grade. This grade may be tied in with class participation (i.e., reading a story aloud), but the <i>primary</i> purpose, as shown through the historical unfolding of the classroom activity, is the grade.	Quizzes  Tests  Benchmarks  Reading log
Participation	Students who write to participate are <i>primarily</i> (i.e., according to the goals of the instructor) writing in order to engage in class participation. This is not to say that the writing is not important or will not be scored, but rather that the purpose of the writing is to participate in class in some way, either through sharing with a partner, sharing with the class, or in order to complete a subsequent activity.	“Do Now” assignment  Best line selection  Poetry
Expansion	Students write to expand when they engage in an act of writing that carries beyond the walls of Emily’s classroom. This is frequently writing that is district-wide and orchestrated among different classes. It does not include homework assignments.	Restorative Justice  Next Year’s Course Selections  <i>Navigator</i> submissions
Reframing	Students who engage in writing to reframe are reviewing and reflecting upon the work (which is not necessarily limited to writing) that they have completed for Emily’s class. This work may appear to be reflective in nature much of the time, but in order to avoid any confusion between	Summarizing one’s own work  Reflecting upon work throughout a unit  Reflecting upon process



	the theoretical frame of Dewey and this code, I have left it as “reframing.”	
Writing	Students who write to write are completing a writing assignment with the primary goal of having something written. Student writing during the “Writing to Write” purpose is only evaluated for completion. Emily’s embracing of the experiential writing approach in different aspects of her course brings this code to the fore in many different ways.	OpTIC writing activities  River teeth

The column to the left identifies the seven different purposes that Emily has students write for during the school year. These actions are clearly defined by the middle column, with examples provided on the right. Each purpose of writing is determined through the interactions of people during a given act of writing. Both teacher and student can talk any of the purposes of writing into being through the exposures that they control (Exposures 1, 2, 4, 6, and 10 for teachers; Exposures 3, 5, 7, and 11 for students). However, in order to provide an organizational method to this part of the chapter, the writing purposes that I present below are purposes established from the teacher’s perspective, with the students’ own interpretation of their writing purposes embedded within that larger purpose. This method of organization both makes the presentation of cases below easier to follow and underscores the balance of power in the classroom: since Emily had greater control of materials than individual students, her decisions about the purposes of any given writing assignment had greater sway, and students’ attempts to write for their own purposes were structured by the tools that she provided.

The seven purposes emerged from the *in vivo* coding process of the participants in Emily's classroom, even if the language that I chose to use was not. The language I chose to use, in the end, directs the researcher's attention to the activities that the writing purpose enables rather than its genre while also staying true to what the classroom participants—either consciously or tacitly—were trying to accomplish with their writing. While the participants may find the terms I used unfamiliar, they are able to bring the researcher's attention to bear on the proper aspects of writing as well as make the connections to larger social and historical forces more clear.

Because all writing activities are interactional accomplishments, the participants in the field may (and often do) each exhibit different understandings about the purpose of writing they are privileging in a given situation, but these differences can be identified in the multiple exposures as described in chapter four and used below. For example, Emily may assign a writing assignment so that students can perform for a grade, but students may take the activities up in order to write to participate in the social circumstances around them. In that case, Emily's primary writing purpose would be "Writing to Perform" while her students were focused on "Writing to Participate." As will be seen in the analysis below, these differences in the direction of writing activity heavily influence the trajectory of a student's writing development.

The writing that Emily's students completed often filled more than one writing purpose, but equally important is the fact that many different kinds of writing were tied together in complex ways to perform different roles within the classroom. The genre sets and genre systems, which serve as material connections among different sites of literate acts, also serve as a tie among different writing purposes on different documents. For example, a

student may “Write to Perform” an informative essay. This essay will be scored by Emily, thus reinforcing the “Write to Perform” role that the student initially performed. The genre system of the classroom, then, both constructs and reinforces the writing purpose that the student identified. Furthermore, the student’s prior writing on informative writing that Emily assigned before the informative essay writing may also serve to both construct and reinforce the student’s understanding of the informative essay as a “Write to Perform” action. The genre set of “Informative Writing” that the student engaged in led the student to understand the informative essay as a “Write to Perform” moment, something that was talked into understanding through interaction with other students and the teacher as they were completing these kinds of activities. The teacher’s completion of the genre system by grading the informative essay also completes the student’s understanding of the way in which this writing occurred.

Furthermore, upon completion of this aspect of the classroom genre system, the student may have to complete another assignment with the completed work. During the reflective writing activities at the conclusion of a given unit, for example, Emily has her students consider what they learned in class by highlighting their notes and worksheets, and then writing a three-sentence reflection on their learning. This reflective activity allowed the students to take their earlier writing, which had been “Writing to Organize,” “Writing to Prepare,” and “Writing to Participate” and engage in “Writing to Reframe” with it. Through the organization and alignment of various genres of writing, and through the mutual construction of the genre system of the classroom, Emily’s students are able to appropriate their writing for different purposes both as they go about writing and after the writing is completed. Students are able to use their writing for actions other than what they had

initially intended. Students (and their teacher) can also switch among the seven different writing intentions through their interactions with one another and the tools around them. An assignment that calls on students to “Write to Perform” may have that writing purpose shoved back and forth along a continuum of levels as students go about completing the task.

Within Emily’s classroom, students engage in many different writing activities, but all of them fall within one or more of the seven different purposes discussed above. Emily and her students talk different purposes of these writings into being and order them in different ways both while the writing is happening and afterward, and their interactive work to accomplish this is supported by the genre sets and systems available in the classroom. Once students complete a piece of writing, they can appropriate that writing in a different way (i.e., from “Writing to Perform” to “Writing to Reframe”) to accomplish new goals that they may not have had in mind when they completed the writing originally. But the various purposes of writing that students activate in Emily’s classes are not the only thing to be orchestrated: as students orient to writing in different ways, they also order the talk and tools in their environment as necessary to accomplish their mutually-established goals. The different purposes of writing are constructed within streams of activity, which students organize with one another and their teacher in order to activate the purposes of writing that they wish to activate.

This section, as well as the previous two, has provided a broad overview of what happened in Emily’s classroom throughout the school year. Emily’s class had a clear progression from the start of the school year to the end of the year that her students were able to identify, index, and use to construct their own goals. Emily also had a loose but straightforward classroom organization with clear activity-changing cues that her students

were able to use to make sense of their situation on a daily basis. By drawing from these cues, students wrote seven different purposes of writing (in various forms) in order to make sense of, remediate, and reproduce the class structure.

All of this information about what happens in Emily's classroom is interesting, but does not paint a clear picture of how student writing activity develops throughout the school year. If, as was posited earlier, the development of student writing occurs when students engage in the re-orchestration of activities around (and including) the act of writing, these changes will be seen through an analysis of moment-to-moment literate activity. In the next section, I discuss specific literate acts within each of the seven writing purposes that students completed throughout the school year during Emily's class. The analysis above contextualizes the writing activity that students do in class so that the individual units discussed below can connect outward to the more enduring phenomena in the classroom, and so that the activity that students complete during literate acts can be more effectively traced across different writing activities.

### **Exploring Writing Activity Development via Purposes and Exposures**

Before identifying the development of writing activity below, a brief overview of the codes, exposures, and purposes identified above is in order to make the presentation of claims and evidence below clear. The theoretical framework of chapter two indicated the potential value of a grounded theory approach to studying Emily's classroom, something that was followed up on in chapter three. This process of coding led to a complex, interrelated series of codes. To better explain utilize these codes and relate them to the perspectives of different actors in given situation (particularly given the ethnomethodological aspects of my theoretical framework), I organized these codes into what Prior (1998) refers to as

“exposures,” which organized talk, tools, and texts in any given moment of writing into layers of interaction that, when put together, show the densely textured totality of a moment of writing activity. Within these densely textured moments, students and teachers wrote (or directed writing) for many, often overlapping purposes. These purposes were established through the talk, tools, and texts present in the exposures analyzed.

In order to present the changes in writing activity that I categorize as development, I present, below, the literate acts selected through the process in chapter four according to the purposes that Emily assigned to them. Since Emily, through her position as classroom teacher, has more power to shape the activities in the classroom than the individual students do, organizing literate acts according to her own purposes and identifying how students, through the talk, tools, and texts captured via various exposures, organized their own purposes proved a more straightforward and readable organizational choice than other available options. Furthermore, Emily’s purposes for writing often dictate the material connections available to link one literate act with another. While students may certainly use these material connections for their own purposes, it is often the purposes of the instructor that brings those materials on the scene in the first place.

The subsections below identify writing activities by the purposes identified from the talk, tools, and texts presented in Exposures 2, 4, 6, 10, and (when noted) 8. Within these activities, specific literate acts are identified that show, through explanations via Exposures 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11, how students take up, reshape, and direct their own purposes that may or may not align with the instructor. Material connections taken up by the students are also identified. Finally, the changes in activity that students show within each purpose (and across purposes, as the occasion merits) are explored.

Throughout my yearlong experience with these students, I saw a great many literate acts, even excluding the acts that do not meet the full selection criteria addressed above. In the limited space of this text, however, it was impossible to show all of them. What I have done instead is provide contextualized literate acts of individuals as they develop in their own unique paths as writers throughout the school year. In this selection process, I took advantage of my perspective as the on-site researcher who saw these students grow in many different ways throughout the year. I used that information to select meaningful literate acts that show students engaged in writing in ways that reflect the start of significant changes in the way that they write. The literate acts below are at an intersection of clearly showing the writing purpose (along with its interactional establishment) and being an important developmental moment for the student being studied in some way. Each literate act examined below shows (1) evidence of the writing purpose that Emily set in motion; (2) the classroom context within which the literate act occurred; (3) evidence of development for the student under study by highlighting how he or she carried material connections beyond the immediate literate act; and (4) findings that inform how writing activity develops in students over time. Below, I contextualize each literate act, show the lead up to the change in writing activity, connect that change to my experiences with the student, and explain how that change sustains itself in future writing activities.

At the end of each of the purposes for writing, I sum up the key takeaways that will be used, at the conclusion of the chapter, to direct the construction of answers to the research questions. The presence of these facts is not to limit the attention of the reader but rather indicate what will be built upon in terms of later theory building. These key takeaways are meant, in both their presence and their form, to serve as a bridge between the larger

generalizations structured by the theoretical framework and the context-heavy specifics of the situations within which writing changes as shown by the detail of each literate act.

**Writing to organize.** From the first day of school until the last, Emily used writing as an organizational agent in her classroom, and regularly encouraged her students to take similar steps independently. She began this process at the start of the school year by using the first “Do Now” period of every week to have students copy the week’s upcoming assignments into their agendas.

This initial presence of “Writing to Organize” indicates a clear sponsor of literacy: the local school district. According to an early interview with Emily, the school district asked the teachers at Goodland Middle School to select strategies to use across the subject areas to help students be more successful in school. The school decided, among other things, to have students write about upcoming assignments in their agendas and organize all of their subjects in a single, three-ring binder.

Both of these tools—the agendas and the three-ring binders—are key tools when Emily has her students write to organize, but, as always, Emily shaped these sponsors toward her own ends. The tools that Emily uses come to her via the sponsors of the local school district. However, these tools do not carry the power or the importance, in the 2013-2014 school year, that they have in years past. Emily acknowledged, in an interview, that the curriculum director who pushed such measures had since left the school, and current administrative officials did not press teachers to use them. The sponsorship forces behind these tools had significantly weakened, and Emily noted on several occasions that her fellow teachers did not always use them.



Despite the lack of power within these sponsored elements, Emily continued to use them. She did this because, as she acknowledged in another interview, they were “good ideas” that made her classroom, in her opinion, more effective. Thus, the local school district sponsorship, while weakening its support for agendas and binders, was given extra power in Emily’s classroom through her own experience with these sponsorship moves (which can be seen via Exposure 10).

The detailed knowledge of the process of binder and agenda power in Emily’s classroom is important because these “Writing to Organize” documents influence a great deal of other “Writing to Organize” moments. The agenda and the binder have to be aligned with all other “Writing to Organize” activities. Furthermore, the presence of the local school district and Emily’s experienced-based perception of these tools as good ideas crop up again and again in the writing moments of the students below.

The agendas and the binders also served to begin—from the start of the school year—the structure of “Writing to Organize” activities. These activities have a rhythm to them in Emily’s classroom, and students engage in these kinds of writing differently than they engage in other kinds of writing, although that is not to say that these moments do not impact their writing activity development as the school year progresses. Throughout most of the writing that she assigns, Emily allows her students some freedom of individual expression, even if she is trying to teach them specific sentence structures or larger organizational ideas. During the “Writing to Organize” activities, however, Emily often requires students to write exactly as she writes. The students need to know exactly what is due, when it is due, and what the specific assignment is, and Emily encourages students to write in a way that will allow them to more clearly remember the specifics of the assignment at a later date. Furthermore, the

specifics of the writing allow Emily to expand upon it later in the review of the lesson and upcoming activities that follows the close of every “Do Now” activity.

In Emily’s eyes, then, the “Writing to Organize” purpose helps her organize her students for future writing (or reading) action, and the primary tools of that organization, while not as heavily weighted by her superiors as they used to be, are still useful tools that allow her to more easily help her students remain organized. The exacting specificity of these assignments allows Emily to expand on each assignment during later discussions that are built into the general structure of her classroom.

This specificity, in Emily’s eyes, may definitely serve as the grounds for later writing development because it organizes the students, but does not, in terms of independent writing activity, do much for students. In fact, when discussing the amount of writing during an interview, Emily dismissed the idea of organizational writing as a kind of writing that students did. Emily, in both her discussions with her students and her interviews with me, discussed “writing” generally as extended, organized text for the purposes of communicating with others. While she did, in her interview with me, concede that “Writing to Organize” does, indeed, involve writing, when she discusses writing in her class, this is not what she refers to.

When examining what individual students did during organizational moments of writing over time, however, Emily’s views of the power of “Writing to Organize” seem to understate the issue—I found that these moments of inscription could be powerful developmental moments for students, and so expanded my “writing” criteria as a result. These moments of organization, it would seem, did not simply help students organize their writing for a particular grade or maintain the organization, but assisted students in

conceptually organizing their understanding of writing and its various tasks and elements. Below, I identify several literate acts that, in Emily's eyes, fell under the purpose of "Writing to Organize," and trace the changes in writing activity that emerged from that via student exposures and the material connections that the literate acts contributed to. The literate acts examined here are drawn from the selection process identified in chapter four, and are presented in chronological order so that earlier understandings developed by students can be more easily traced by the reader.

***Putting the "Table of Contents" to work.*** One of the most powerful organizing tools for Emily throughout the school year was the use of a "Table of Contents." At the start of each unit, Emily hands out a sheet as seen in the figure below. This is the top page in the "English" section of students' binders. All other material that students receive from Emily is recorded here, along with the possible points from each one, in the order in which they are received. At the end of each unit (or sometimes earlier, if the Table of Contents fills up sooner than expected), Emily's students total their points, double check their pages, and add up their available points. The students do not do this entirely independently: Emily, through the use of a document camera at the front of the classroom, leads her students through this "Writing to Organize" moment page-by-page, in addition to leading the students through the original process of recording activities on the Table of Contents itself. Through references to the Table of Contents, students are able to orient themselves to writing activities in class quickly and easily, thus leading the activity to fall under the "Writing to Organize" purpose.

As Holly's example in the figure below indicates, and as Emily's structuring of the writing activity supports, much of the writing that students do here is hardly new for them: students are introduced early on to the structure of the Table of Contents and, by the end of

the second quarter, students fill in the document without comment, either for Table of Content entries or for a review at the end of a unit. However, while Emily has set these activities up as tools for future learning, she has also unwittingly created opportunities for writing development that some of her students, on occasion, take up.

**Figure 5.1: Holly's Hero's Journey Table of Contents**

Unit Title: <u>The Hero or Heroine's Journey</u>			
Table of Contents	Points Possible	Points Earned	Comments
1. Depth and Complexity Response	10	—	with example
2. Traits of the Hero Epic	40	—	;) :
3. Template for Writing	10	—	;) :
4. Literature Group Meeting #1	10	10	;) :
5. Comma Rules C-Notes	20	—	;) :
6. Using Commas	20	—	;) :
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			
11.			
12.			
13.			
+ 5 = Yes! Done! + 0 = Not done			
<b>Organization:</b> Correct heading / title on every page. Correct number of assignments. Packet in correct order / neat / no ragged edges / no loose pages, & stapled. Table of Contents is complete / correct / neat	5	—	;) :
<b>Quality:</b> Each page is neat and legible. Complete sentences when required. Shows thought and effort throughout. End-of-unit reflection is complete.	5	—	;) 30
	100	100	

As Holly's sample above shows, the Table of Contents is not just a recording tool but a point of interaction not just between student and teacher but among the students themselves. On the left-hand side of the page, Emily directs students about what should be added in, and the students fill the sheet in accordingly. On the right hand side of the page, students fill in the points they were awarded, which are then double checked by a peer before turning it in. At the bottom of the page (removed from the figure above to protect the identities of the participants), the partner signs the page to assert the correctness of the student's work.

At this point of interaction, students can also construct the task for themselves, based on the available talk, tools, and texts in the vicinity, the participatory actions of those around them, individual and shared experiences of the event, and of course each of their independent histories outside of the event. Through these elements, the students can accomplish the goal of the writing in Emily's eyes while also taking writing activity development steps on their own. However, through the subsequent texts written by students, along with their interactions about those texts, an entirely different kind of writing activity seems to be taking place at the same time.

A particularly clear interaction based on the selection process determined in chapter three occurred on April 24, at the end of a two-week poetry unit. The students spent the first part of class sharing their favorite poems with one another and getting new reading group books from the cart that the librarian had brought to the back of the classroom. After the poetry sharing was completed and the new books were handed out, Emily gave awards to students who had done the best (according to a class vote) while reading their poetry aloud. Emily then asked students to turn to their Table of Contents while simultaneously holding it up and broadcasting it on the big screen TV behind her.

Emily had informed students earlier in the period that "We're going to add up the points," and then began setting up the upcoming activity as the students were taking their material out: "I need all people turning to this and then I'll tell you what to do next. First thing is raise your hands if you've already added up the points for us. Who has added up the points?" With this move, Emily invited the students to participate in the highly structured organization of the Table of Contents. One student raised her hand and was called on by Emily to say her answer aloud ("90"). However, Emily's structure of allowing participation

for the “Writing to Organize” enabled some students to do different things. A particularly clear example of this is Zack, who shouts “I did” in response to Emily’s question and announces “110” when the student Emily selected is speaking.

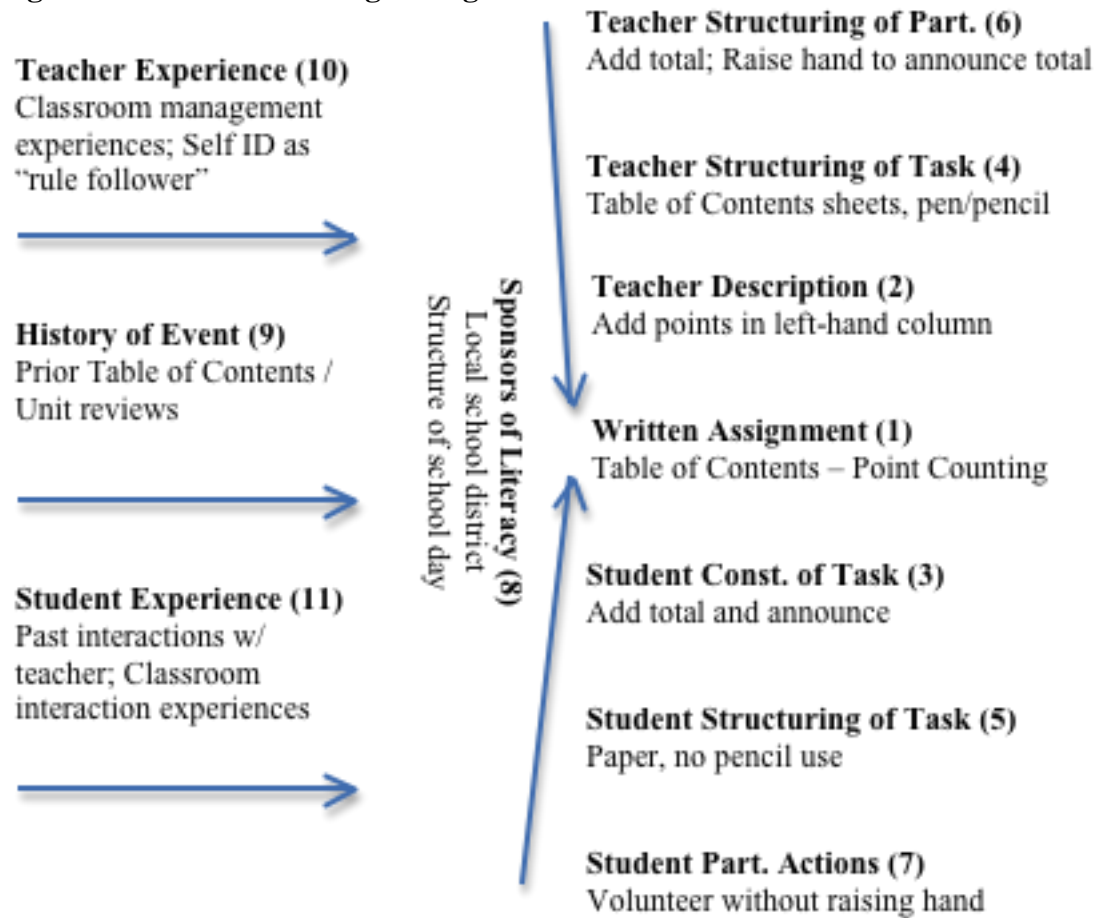
This kind of participation—not exactly disruptive but certainly not following the expected script of the interaction—is an elaboration on a common interactional move for Zack. Zack has always pushed at the bounds of what “counts” as appropriate class participation, although this is the first time that his pushing actively confronts the teacher, and so directly goes against the interactional format that she had set up. Furthermore, the move on this particular day sets Zack up for another, later off-key moment of interaction with Emily that sets up a changed writing experience for him during the reflection on the back of the Table of Contents sheet. Zack asks, when Emily describes the reflective activity “Can we be opinionated?” Emily responds that they can, but asks to support the opinion with evidence from the packet.

The reflection segment of the Table of Contents actually falls under a different purpose (“Writing to Reframe”), but the act of completing the Table of Contents—both through interactions with Emily and his classmates and through the act of filling in the Table of Contents on the page—allows Zack to approach the activity somewhat differently in very concrete terms: Zack shakes up the pattern of interactions between student and teacher by shouting answers without being called upon, and continues to shake up the expected nature of interaction and activity (as determined through previous reflection and unit organizing activities) by asking if he can be “opinionated.” He does work his way into the established interactional structure of the classroom (i.e., he asks permission of the teacher, and the

teacher clarifies, thus sanctioning and focusing his activity), although his discourse attempts to shift the focus of at least part of the assignment.

Zack's hard work to make his voice and preferences heard in the classroom comes to naught on paper, however. While he has filled in all of the required point values and assignment names for the unit, he does not list the points he received, does not total them up, and does not sign his name at the bottom of the page. Zack has taken this "Writing to Organize" moment and used it to further clarify not only his voice but his position within the class, even as the final product of that clarification does not benefit from it, at least in the short term. However, Zack's actions can still be seen as part of an unfolding attempt to locate himself, his personality, his views, and his writing within the discourse that makes up the classroom. His construction of the task as well as the structuring of his participative actions (Exposures 3 and 7, respectively) contribute to Zack's unfolding experiences within the classroom (Exposure 11) as he continues to evolve into the not-quite-rule-following classroom participant that I can confidently describe him as by year's end.

**Figure 5.2: Zack's "Writing to Organize" Literate Act**



The graphic above shows Zack constructing a literate act through the structure of the classroom and with the interaction of the teacher toward his own ends. Zack draws off of some of the tools available around him to create an answer to the question that Emily asks, and makes a participative action that conflicts with the participative structure that Emily has set forth. This newly-structured participative action is in line with Zack's past experiences, although in this case the participative structure itself carries into another literate act. As the class moves into the next writing purpose (i.e., "Writing to Reframe"), Zack continues to participate in a way that clashes—albeit lightly—with the participative structures set up by Emily ("Can we be opinionated?").



**Figure 5.3: Zack's Continued Literate Act Pattern**

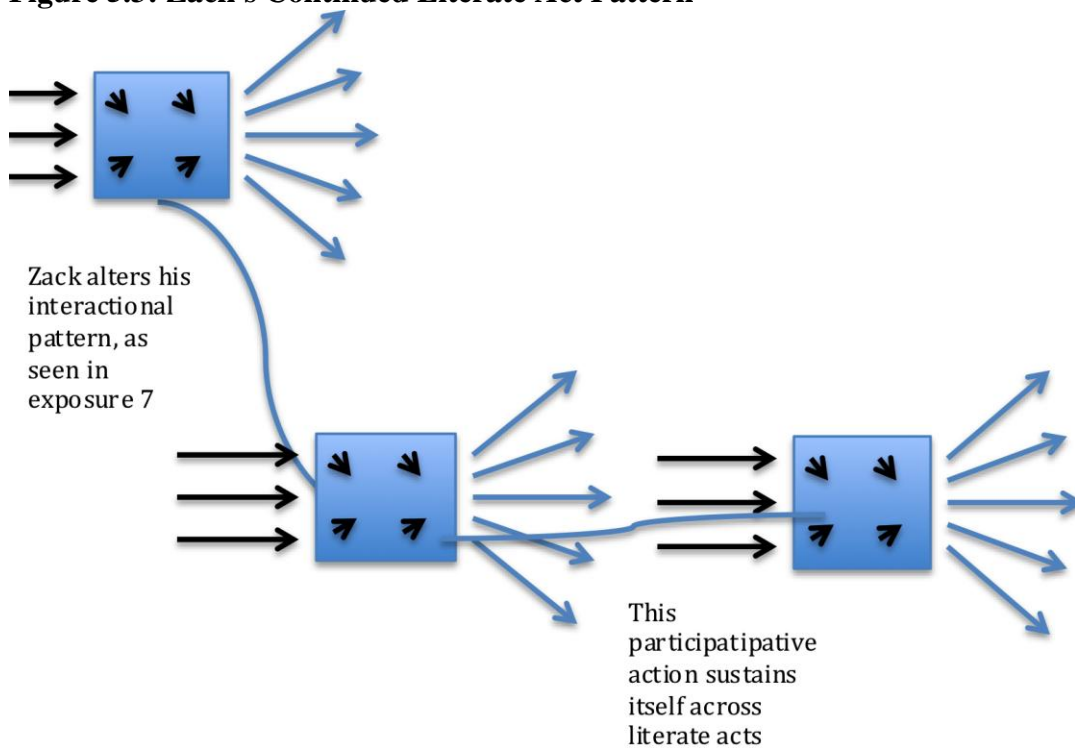


Figure 5.3 shows Zack's participative actions as revealed by Exposure 7 to shift from the first literate act to the second. This move "downward" represents a change in the organization of activity, and the blue, curved line between the first literate act and the second indicates a shifted organization of talk, tools, and texts in a single exposure—in this case, Exposure 7—as opposed to material connections as shown by the blue arrows. This exposure has changed compared to Zack's prior participative actions within literate acts: Zack is participating, but doing so in a way that more directly involves interaction with the teacher and more directly contradicts the structure of participation that Emily has organized. The directness of this change carries over to the next literate act (i.e., the unit reflection) within the exposure of the participative actions of Zack, even though Zack's take up of text, in the end, is not completed. However, this shifted, more contrary approach to participative actions sets up Zack's later literate act development not only in terms of what he does or does

not do for class, but in what he is able to do outside of class. This will be made clear during the “Writing to Expand” purpose.

Through the interactional opportunities in the “Writing to Organize” purpose, Zack was able to further establish his identity within the classroom around and for the act of writing. He pushed forward with an interactional framework that, while reminiscent of how he has participated throughout the year, takes a step forward in how he interacts with the teacher and structures his writing opportunities. This step forward, as can be seen in figure 5.3, is carried further into other literate act construction in the immediate future, and shapes his take-up of future literate opportunities later in the school year. Within this everyday writing moment, Zack changes his participative organization around and for writing, and his writing activity remains dynamically shifted afterward.

*Organizing agendas for the end-of-year anthologies.* At the end of each school year, Emily tries to present her students with some kind of publication that incorporates the work of the entire class. This year, Emily decided to use a digital format. The work that the students submit to the end-of-year anthology has already been written by the students, although they have the opportunity to revise their work for submission if they choose.

The anthology itself, however, is not the focus of analysis at the moment. The focus, rather, is on the work of the students during their May 21 agenda organizing, as they prepared themselves—much as Emily encouraged them to throughout the year—to participate in this anthology by writing notes about it in their agendas. Because agenda writing is meant to organize student activity in and for the future, it falls under the “Writing to Organize” purpose. The students are not using the writing itself to improve as writers, although the activities that they organize within the purpose may result in sustained, changed

writing activity. Emily created this “Writing to Organize” moment through her work with the organization of classroom activity, her description of the activity, and her structure of participation for that activity. From there, students drew from their experiences and constructed the task in their own way so that they were able to, later, develop new texts for the end-of-year anthology.

Emily shaped this “Writing to Organize” moment through the structure of the class period that she had developed throughout the course of the school year. There were some changes to this particular lesson, particularly at the beginning, but the students still found the common structures of the class period there to rely on and understand their situations as the class developed. Class began for Emily and her students at the library, where they were given the opportunity to hand in their textbooks. This process took approximately eight minutes. After the books were returned, Emily’s class returned to her room to complete a sentence-combining-based “Do Now” activity. This activity followed the three-part writing structure that the students had completed throughout the year. Once the students were finished with that activity, Emily had the students open their agendas to make some changes to what they had written during an earlier class period.

This activity was familiar on several levels. First, Emily had had students make changes to their agendas before. Second, Emily organized this agenda writing at the start of class, before the review and main activity. While the class had actually begun two activities earlier, with the library trip and the “Do Now,” the transition from one activity to another remained clear to students, and the organization of activities to follow was also familiar to those who participated in class on a regular basis.

Once the students completed the agenda revisions, Emily launched into the traditional third step of her lesson plan format, the review. During the review, Emily explained not only the changes to the agenda but also the general assignment of the end-of-year anthology. In this way, Emily was able to use the expected structures of the class to shape a writing moment for students with the purpose of “Writing to Organize.” She was also able to use the subsequent expected structure of the class to shape her opportunity to reinforce the “Writing to Organize” idea.

As the video of this lesson reveals, however, Emily was not the only person in the room using this writing moment to their own advantage, and this is where the power of “Writing to Organize” moments is made clear as a method of developing students’ understandings not only of given assignments but of their ideas about writing in general. When Emily has students “Write to Organize,” she often accompanies this writing with a thorough explanation, and in these moments of writing and listening—in the balance of actively putting words on the page and passively listening to the instructor’s explanations—subtle regroupings, reorganizations, and recategorized understandings can emerge.

Consider, for example, Emily’s opening discussion as students began filling in their agendas, as shown in the table below. In this overview, Emily has students take out their agendas and adjust what they have already written in them. She connects these changes to larger sponsoring forces, such as the National Junior Honor Society and, later in the class, the district’s Gifted And Talented Education (GATE) program. Emily has structured this activity to be a “Writing to Organize” moment which will help students prepare for upcoming assignments. However, several students take advantage of this moment to

organize themselves differently, or to put themselves to work in ways that, while not contrary to Emily's intentions, certainly expand on them.

**Table 5.2: Emily's Agenda Adjustments**

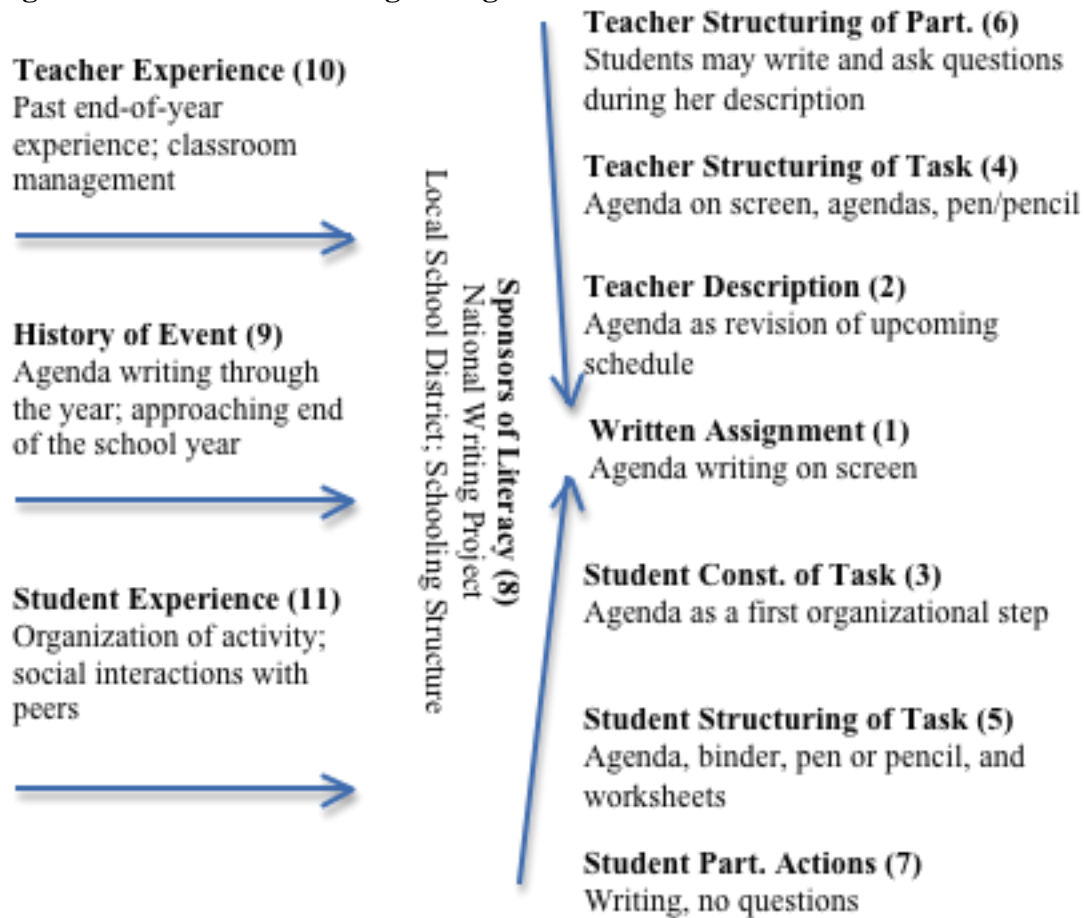
Emily: Can you please take out your agendas? Because there are some changes. So tomorrow is changed...and let me tell you why. First of all, if you're one of the people who forgot your library book, write that in for tonight's homework. And then I want you to cross off "Finish River Teeth Memoir" and the reason is I did not realize that the National Junior Honor Society celebration is tomorrow period four and that affects most of you. Um, you know if you are invited to the celebration for National Junior Honor Society because they sent you a letter, um, or told you in the office, I'm not sure. You would have been informed.

A strong example of this is Rachel, who was seated at the back of the room for this particular part of the school year. Rachel's location within the classroom was, for her, an unfortunate one, as she was positioned next to two highly talkative students who often talked through instructions and activities. While Emily was talking, one student had turned around and begun speaking to the other. Emily addressed the situation quickly, but Rachel had to work—both in that moment and throughout the remainder of the "Writing to Organize" purpose—to keep her attention on Emily's words and on her own agenda. As Emily continued to elaborate on how various sponsors were impacting some of the changes in the schedule (as well as how her own belated awareness of these forces had caused the scheduling errors in the first place), Rachel began shifting her activity away from the actual

agenda and toward the organization related to the agenda—a move that Emily herself would make just a few minutes later in the lesson.

Emily’s “Writing to Organize” moment, however, took Rachel further than Emily herself realized. The organizational activity led Rachel to re-organize not only her agenda, but the English section of her binder as well. As Emily speaks, Rachel can be seen reorganizing the sheets of her binder, discarding some as the occasion warranted—an easy task, since the wastebasket was in the same corner of the room that she was—and keeping herself, at the same time, aloof from the activities of the talking students next to her. Rachel structured her task with the elements in her binder and in her agenda so that she could maintain focus on Emily’s words, continue to act in a way that “counted” as participation for that part of the class period, and, at the same time, organize her participatory actions to lead her away from the interactions that were occurring next to her. In short, Rachel followed the instructions that Emily presented but used the remaining time to carry on in a similar direction, re-organizing her binder and preparing for upcoming work more extensively. Rachel has used the community value of organization to lead her away from troublesome social entanglements and into classroom-sanctioned behavior.

**Figure 5.4: Rachel's "Writing to Organize" Literate Act**



In the literate act shown above, the exposure of “Student Construction of Task” and “Student Structuring of Task” shows Rachel taking up the tools around her for more elaborate purposes as Emily continues to explain the “Writing to Organize” moment to the class. Rachel uses the “Writing to Organize” purpose that the agenda writing constitutes and uses it to further organize herself among her binder and the handouts that she has. This activity also cancels out another possible activity: that of interacting further with the peers around her. In this moment, then, it becomes clear that Rachel has not only run with the community value of organization—as established through discussions about organization throughout the school year—but that she has been able to balance her social and academic engagements at this point in the school year.

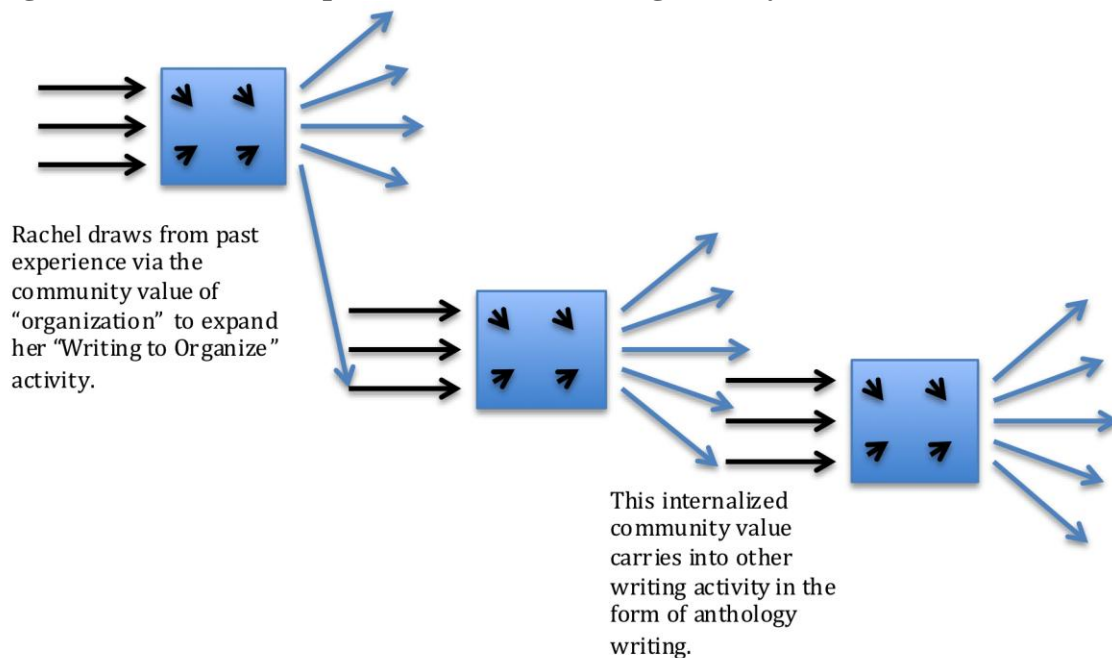
Furthermore, as Rachel moves into other writing activities based on the organizing that she does now, she can more effectively engage with those activities and, by extension, continue to carry the organizational community value forward. An example of this is shown in the figure below. The literate acts before the one shown above have brought Rachel to the given state of organization that she has at the start of the literate act. However, as Emily discusses changes with the students to the schedule, and as the end of the school year is discussed, Rachel begins taking on the organizational thrust that Emily has encouraged in her students throughout the year (and that she encourages through her discussions of organization and opportunities for binder organization throughout the year). In doing so, she leaps ahead of the organization that Emily calls for in her activity while still meeting the demands of the classroom that Emily has set up in this moment. As Rachel moves into later writing activities, such as her writer's notebook and her end-of-year anthology selections, this organizational push carries forward through the material connection of community values not just as smoother writing activity but as a way to understand writing and go about writing differently.

Table 5.5 represents the ways in which Rachel's literate act, which incorporates the community value of organization, shifts and keeps shifted the writing activity that she engaged in for the remainder of the school year. Note the "Community Value" arrow on the first literate act linking up with Rachel. Rachel does not change her writing activity simply because her organizational effort in the "Writing to Organize" purpose streamlined her later activity: rather, her organizational efforts come to change the ways in which she goes about the act of writing. As Rachel completes the writing assignments at the conclusion of the year, she is careful to attend to the ways in which her work can be and is organized. This shows



through in her organizational efforts for her “River Teeth” writing a few weeks later. Organizing herself of her own accord—and internalizing the organizational community value in the process—pushed her writing efforts forward, as will be shown in the “Writing to Reframe” example below.

**Figure 5.5: Rachel's Perpetuated Shift in Writing Activity**



Contrast this activity with the activity of Don, who was serving as the point keeper for the quarter that this video was taken in. Don had spent the second part of the lesson—the completion of the sentence-combining “Do Now” activity—awarding points to different groups who were participating. After the groups finished and Emily moved on, Don was not quite done at the board. He was caught between the instructions to pull his agenda out of his backpack and revise the week’s entries and tallying the points for the week. He chose to finish his point tallying before moving back to his seat and, as a result, had an entirely different experience than Rachel did, even though he did not sit far from her. By the time Don returned to his seat, Emily had already addressed the two students who were not paying

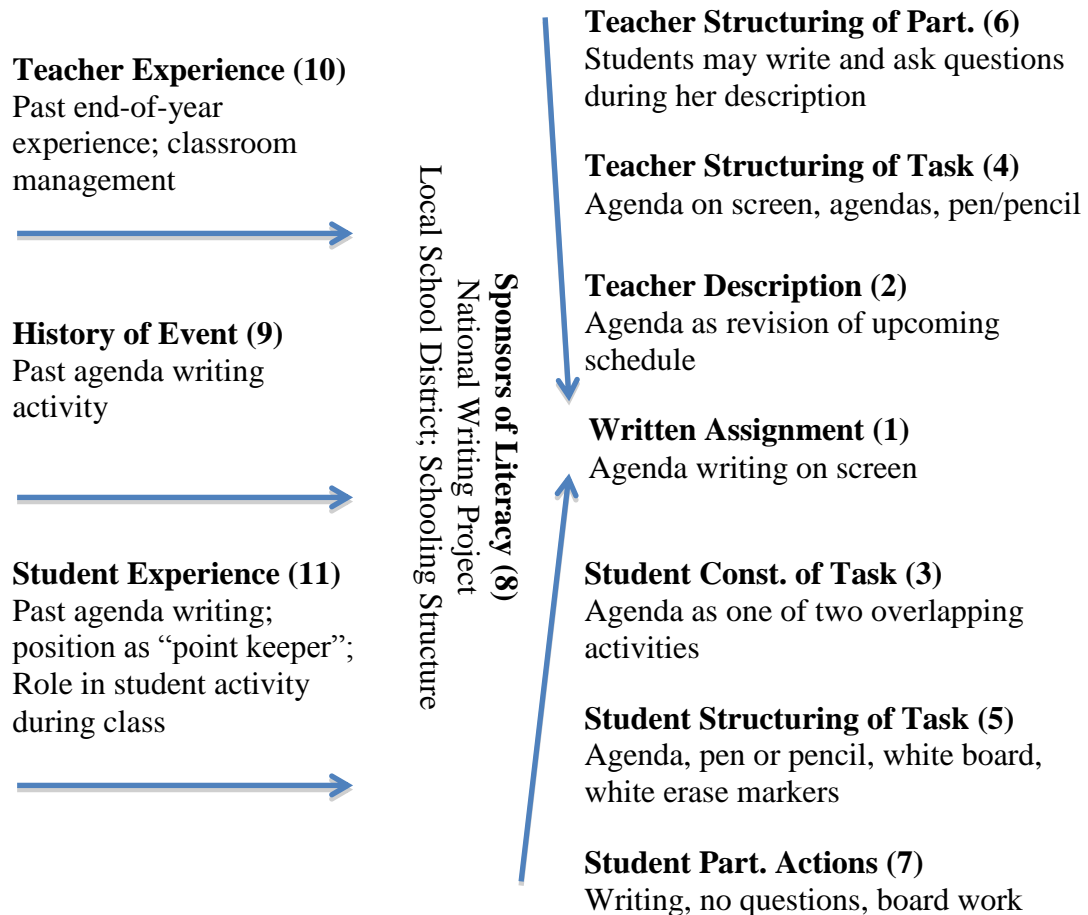
attention to the assignment, and he was able to quickly fill in the changes before Emily moved on to a discussion about the survey that the GATE (“Gifted and Talented Education program) sponsorship brought into the classroom. Don’s construction of the task did not compete with or exceed Emily’s, but rather was constructed with and as part of another task—that of keeping track of the points for each group. Due to his own time crunch, Don’s late participative actions were right in line with what Emily expected of her students, and that alignment paid dividends, since Don was able to quickly catch himself up with the rest of the class. Don, like Rachel, has also structured his activity to be successful in the eyes of Emily’s writing purpose, but, because he has more than one role to fill in the same amount of time, has to orchestrate his activities differently. The everyday repetitive structure of this segment of Emily’s lesson (as well as the roles that Don must fulfill in that lesson) enables Don to orchestrate his two kinds of writing in ways that “count” for Emily’s classroom.

Figure 5.6 shows how, through Exposures 3, 5, and 7, Don’s successful balancing of the talk, tools, and texts around him to accomplish both writing goals can be described. Don Don participated in the literate act of the agenda revising by not volunteering talk at all during the process. Instead, he took the time to finish his board work, which left him time to, later, fill in the agenda writing that he needed to do.

This commitment to two separate types of writing that “counted” in different ways through the community of the classroom is, first, an example of the balancing act that Don has had to deal with since he was first “hired” to be the point keeper for the class. In this moment, however, there is an awareness of multiple tasks for multiple purposes that Don has not shown before. When Don was first hired, the writing that he did for the “Point Keeper” position seemed to be something he enjoyed more than the writing that he had to do for class.

In this moment, however, he appears to be valuing both equally, and splitting his time to accomplish both tasks.

**Figure 5.6: Don's Literate Act**



This balancing of tasks persists in interesting ways throughout the remainder of the year, and it connects with the future writing that Don does via the material connection of genre sets. In the moment shown above, Don has changed his valuing of the different tasks he has to complete. Rather than completing one of his two tasks and using the one he does complete as a reason for not completing the second, Don instead begins to order the various genres that he has to work with in a particular order so that he can complete them all. Don's

actions in this literate act show a change in the prioritizing of activities that he carries with him into multiple writing opportunities (i.e., “River Teeth,” anthologies, etc.) throughout the remaining weeks of the school year. This shifted awareness of the importance of different elements of genre sets makes itself known via the attention given to each of the final activities of the year. This attention reveals an increasing awareness of the interconnectedness of the kinds of writing that Don finds himself doing, as well as the management of social arrangements needed to accomplish each of them.

Each of these experiences—Zack, Rachel, and Don—show Emily’s “Writing to Organize” purpose being taken in different directions. Zack used Emily’s structuring of this purpose to create moments of participatory action through the talk, tools, and texts of Exposures 3, 5, and 7. This set him up for continuing the development of his own classroom presence via Exposure 11. Rachel, on the other hand, fell into the expectations of classroom participation easily, carrying Emily’s intentions a step further via Exposures 3 and 5 while aligning her actions in Exposure 7 to Emily’s setup in Exposure 6. Don, by choosing to structure his two tasks together due to his job as “Point Keeper,” ended up following Emily’s purpose in the end, although he was writing for another purpose (i.e., to participate) in the first part of his structure. These three students—as well as many others in the class at the same time—used the moments created by Emily’s focus on “Writing to Organize” to structure their environments to their own ends, but they accomplished Emily’s ends at the same time.

While the changes in writing activity here are not dramatic—Zack pushes back via interaction, Rachel organizes more effectively, and Don writes quickly to make time to award points—the products they create (social positioning, organization, and the

prioritization of class jobs and mandatory student activity, respectively) carry forward from these moments of writing into other, future moments of writing, and it is in the carrying of these moments that writing activity development occurs. Zack carries the concept of “evidence” and “opinion” as discussed in his interaction with Emily forward into his reflective writing. Rachel carries forward her reorganized binder into her next writing activity, as well as her reorganized calendar. Don, because he completes both of his activities (i.e., the point totaling and the binder organization) brings both of those texts with him into his next writing activity, each being socially acceptable and counted as complete. Through the tactical organization of activity in response to the “Writing to Organize” purpose and its attendant tools (along with the other limitations and possibilities of the social environment around them), Zack, Rachel, and Don have material artifacts to bring with them to their next writing situation around the binders and unit packets, and will help them better understand that new situation, their needs, and their goals.

**Table 5.3: Key "Writing to Organize" Takeaways**

Key Takeaways from These Literate Acts
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Meaningful changes in understanding and going about writing can happen in mundane moments of inscription.</li> <li>2. Students take advantage of the texts and tools available to them to construct writing activity.</li> <li>3. Situations of writing have talk, tools, and texts that carry into other, future writing situations.</li> <li>4. Changes in writing activity happen without necessarily having an impact on the page.</li> <li>5. Students and teachers build purposes for writing for one another together.</li> <li>6. Changes in writing activity can be seen through the following of talk, tools, and texts in exposures as well as material connections.</li> <li>7. Individual students can take up a classroom activity in a variety of different ways without violating class norms.</li> </ol>

**Writing to prepare.** Throughout the school year, Emily’s activities often blended together, both within a given lesson and across days, weeks, and months. In this kind of

blending, Emily's students often found themselves writing to prepare themselves for future eventualities. While the idea of preparation was not always foremost in the minds of the students in the class, it certainly was foremost on Emily's mind on several occasions. Two events, in particular, were strongly informed by the "Writing to Prepare" purpose that Emily set forth. The students, as will be seen in subsequent analysis of literate acts, often used these moments to their own purposes, but the purpose of Emily was often caught up in the shape and structure of their writing activity.

Emily had students write to prepare on specific occasions, normally for events involving students speaking aloud to one another. Throughout the entire school year, Emily showed frequent conscious attention to student preparation in order to speak aloud. Students frequently wrote out responses before speaking them, or took some notes about a topic before speaking aloud about it. Only on rare occasions were students given the space to speak extemporaneously on any particular topic.

The "Writing to Prepare" that students engaged in under Emily's direction often came with clear, multimodal instructions. Students often received a sheet directing them in their preparation activity, were introduced to that sheet by Emily, and followed Emily's instructions via a projection of the sheet on the big screen TV at the front of the classroom. Emily used multiple texts in multiple modes to shape the literate acts that students engaged in via the talk, tools, and texts of Exposures 2, 4, and 6 in order to have her students "Write to Prepare."

Of course, as will be seen below, the act of encouraging students to "Write to Prepare" does not mean that the students will write for similar purposes (or, in some cases, even write at all). Much as they did during the "Writing to Organize" purpose, students worked with,

against, and beyond Emily's purpose for writing, and that extra work provided structure for future writing activity development to occur, as well as helping students to shape their understandings of what writing is and how it is done.

Many clear literate acts of "Writing to Prepare" can be identified in the records available for this study, but several particular literate acts highlight the complex interactions among teacher demands and intentions, student expectations, and student activity. The work of Marianne and Alexis during a college prep language arts class, as well as Dan's varied intentions around specific periods of work, provide clear lenses into the different angles that students take to develop complex understandings and expectations of writing activity in Emily's classroom.

***Marianne and Alexis prepare for blog activity, largely by accident.*** During a three-month span throughout the school year, Emily's students engaged in blog writing. The blogs were relatively brief, isolated on the internet (via a blogging site designed for young students in school), and written across the course of several drafts. Students frequently wrote for many purposes during the process of writing these blogs. A particularly clear set of literate acts that stands out, as "Writing to Prepare," however, involves Marianne and Alexis, during one of their library preparation days for blog writing.

During their research day in the library on February 11, Emily provided students with several resources—both paper-and-pencil and online—to go about finding information that they would later use to contribute to their blogs. In the end, students collected much more information than they actually published. Alexis and Marianne stood out during this period because, in their interactions with one another while completing the assignment, they (1) accomplished the purpose that Emily set out for them (i.e., "Writing to Prepare" for blog

writing); (2) while accomplishing this purpose, they also wrote for their own purposes; and (3) while writing for their own purposes, they verbally discussed a great many of their intentions and understandings, which provided a natural microscope into their construction of the task that they were performing.

That the two students were friends (and becoming better friends) had been evident from their interactions during my observations throughout the school year. However, it was not until this activity that the two girls engaged in sustained writing activity together. Emily provided students with several options for writing activity at the start of the lesson, and both Marianne and Alexis chose to start their activity with the hardcopy books that the librarian had set out as resources.

While Marianne and Alexis were completing the sheets on this activity, they sat next to one another and discussed their work. They also, as middle school students, discussed many other things, but the focus on their work came to the fore more often than not – both seemed a little uncertain about the act of library research, so they were still somewhat new to the situation. The table below details how the interaction between the two unfolded.

**Table 5.4: The Progression of Activity for Alexis and Marianne**

Progression of Marianne and Alexis's Activity
<p>1) <b>Book selection / sitting down at table:</b> Marianne and Alexis, after sitting down next to each other at the start of class, select books that the Librarian has gathered and sit down together to complete their assignments.</p> <p>2) <b>Recording MLA information:</b> At the top of the page, Marianne and Alexis record the information from their books in MLA format. While doing so, they discuss their individual books aloud.</p>



- 3) **Admonishment from Librarian:** “This is quiet time.” Marianne and Alexis begin speaking quietly.
- 4) **First important fact:** Marianne is the first to voice a fact that she wants to record on her sheet – “The most important day of her life was March 1, 1887”
- 5) **Discussion about information:** Both students revel in the amount of detail about Helen Keller in each of the sources. Quote Marianne: “Wow, this is all Helen Keller?”
- 6) **Discussion of “first person:”** Alexis and Marianne begin recording facts. As they do so, Alexis says “First person” and Marianne writes it down without reflecting on it. Marianne confronts Alexis about saying it. Alexis: “I don’t know.”
- 7) **Identification of facts about Helen Keller:** Marianne and Alexis spend the next turns at talk identifying facts that they can write down. This is interrupted briefly by another student, who asks “Why do you want to get good grades?” and sends the two off on a second conversation amidst the first.
- 8) **Counting facts:** Alexis and Marianne stop writing facts briefly to count the amount that they have so far. Each has seven facts.
- 9) **Identification of further facts:** The two work in silence as they accumulate between five and ten new facts.
- 10) **Counting facts:** The two students begin counting and adding facts to reach their desired number (17).
- 11) **Discussion with Librarian to find further facts on Rosa Parks:** Alexis receives some help from the librarian to find more information.

12) **Reminder of time:** Marianna reminds Alexis that there are only seven minutes left.

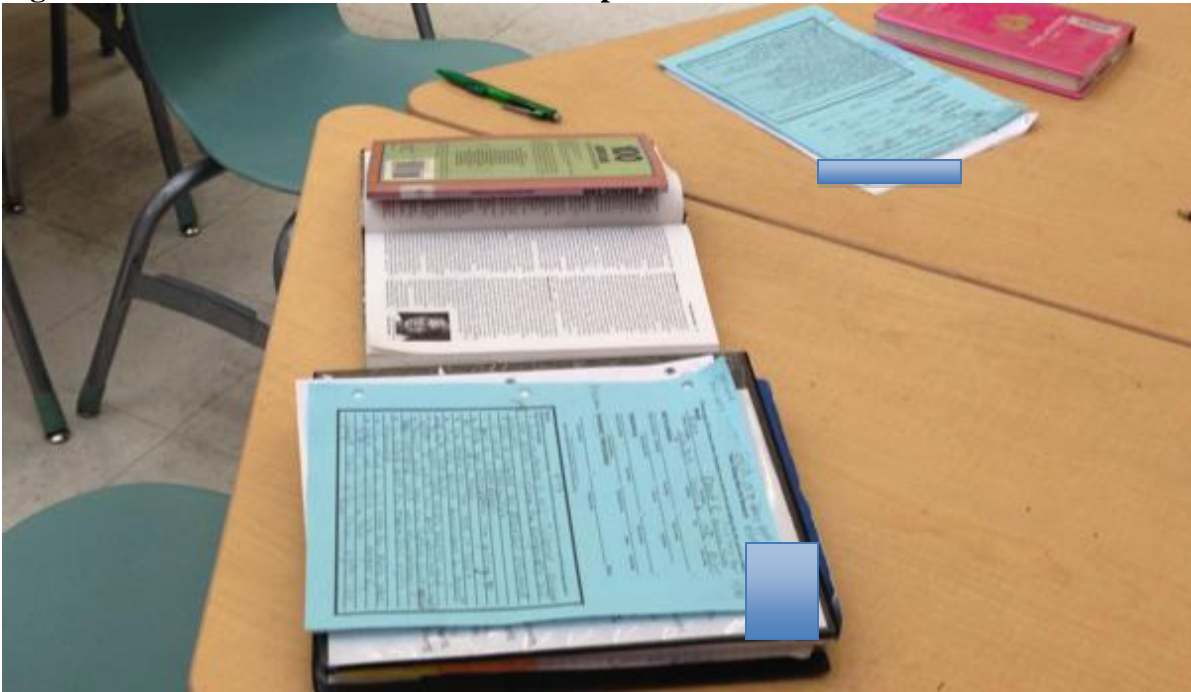
13) **Book check-out options:** Emily reminds Marianne and Alexis that they can check out books if they need to.

14) **More Rosa Parks:** The librarian identifies another overview of Rosa Parks for Alexis

15) **Packing up material:** Emily tells students to pack up their books and wait for the bell to ring.

Despite their relative newness to the situation, Marianne and Alexis were able to complete their assignments without much difficulty. This was due primarily to the established understandings that Emily sought to construct during the opening portion of class: once the students were seated properly in the library, Emily explained at length what their assignment was during the class period. Marianne and Alexis were clearly paying attention to Emily during this period, as they knew exactly what their assignments were. While the two occasionally became confused—at one point, Marianne was uncertain how many entries to make on one of her sheets—they were, by and large, able to complete the work without much confusion. The figure below indicates their arrangement at one of the library's hexagonal tables.

**Figure 5.7: Alexis and Marianne Table Setup**



Marianne and Alexis were required to complete two sheets during their time in the library. They had to complete a “Note taking sheet for research” as well as a “Who is an Upstander?” sheet. These sheets can be seen in the figures below. Marianne and Alexis completed these sheets together, drawing from the resources in the library as necessary in order to complete their work.

**Figure 5.8: Marianne's Note Taking Sheet for Research**

Internet/WEB SOURCE

Hellen Keller

Title of Article \_\_\_\_\_ Website Title \_\_\_\_\_ Web.

Date You Looked--Day Month Year (10 February 2014)

Notes:  
(REMINDERS: Do not write in complete sentences. Do not copy word for word unless you plan to use it as a quote. Write the page number if using a source with pages.)

- pg. 6 • "most important day in her whole life" March 3rd 1887
- pg. 6 • Sullivan gave Helen a doll to gain trust
- pg. 6 • Sullivan spelled words in to Helen's hand
- pg. 6 • 19 months - 7 months -> deaf and blind
- pg. 6 • Wild tantrums as a child
- pg. 6 • independent teacher Annie Sullivan
- pg. 6 • touching Annie's hands releases a question
- pg. 6 • hard to make progress in presence of her family
- pg. 6 • when alone Helen learned 30 words
- pg. 6 • 6-12 new words per day!!
- pg. 6 • each new word -> world expanded
- pg. 6 • she wrote many papers! surprising being blind and deaf
- pg. 6 • used her voice to speak!
- pg. 6 • entered a college in 1900
- pg. 6 • Braille -> mostly what she read through
- pg. 6 • at age 22 she wrote "The Story of My Life"
- pg. 6 • helped other blind & deaf people
- pg. 6 • American Foundation of the Blind -> raising funds
- pg. 6 • author of "The Miracle Worker"
- pg. 6 • died at age 88 in 1968, work inspires people today

These sheets make up the "Written Assignment," or first exposure of the literate acts that these students engage in. These genred activity spaces provide students with direction that they may or may not take advantage of, but need to take advantage of if they wish for their writing to "count" within the organization of the classroom community.

Figure 5.9: Alexis' Who is an Upstander Sheet

**RESEARCH PROJECT: Who Is an Upstander?**

**Common Core State Standards**  
**Writing 7.7** Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions for further research and investigation.  
**Writing 7.8** Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

**Writing Assignment**  
Research someone you believe *might* be an upstander. Find facts/evidence to support your idea. As you research, consider what people may say against you and gather evidence to prove them wrong.

**Explore**  
In the library spend 10 -15 minutes looking through the books and other resources. Find a person who you believe may be an upstander. Write your choice below and get it approved by a teacher.  
After exploring, I want to research Rosa Parks  
I believe he / she is an upstander because...  
she is a civil rights activist. She spoke up for what she believed in.

**Questions:** What do you want to research about your person? Remember, the goal is to argue he or she is an upstander.  
Who? What? Where? When? How? Why?

★ 1. What gave her the courage?  
2. What did she do?  
3. Why do we remember her?  
4. Did she go to jail?  
5. When was she around?  
6. How old was she?  
7. Did she have a mom and dad?  
8. How did she help?  
9. How long was she in jail?  
10. How much was her fine?

Marianne and Alexis work together on independent sheets while looking at two different books. While they are doing this, they pick up several of the resources around them to complete the sheets assigned to them. Completing these sheets, it seems, is important to

both students, and it is also important that they complete the texts in a meaningful way, since they regularly engage in exchanges with one another about the demands of the texts and how they can meet them. Through these discussions, students both construct their understanding of the task and set the stage for structuring their own activity of completing that task.

Emily explained the task to the students in rather clear terms: she separated the blue sheet from the white sheet that the students had to complete, and told the students that the blue sheet would be for the notes that they took. These sheets were more than just places to write: they also offered, with the help of Emily's description, rules for identifying and using resources. Emily had a clear and strict idea of the kinds of information that she wanted, and where she wanted to get that information: she wanted students to take the digital resources available through the school website as well as the print resources that the librarian had set up throughout the library, and she wanted students to conduct a search for information about specific people within those resources. Through her description, Emily clarified that students were to take their notes on the blue sheet of paper, and indicated that the white paper was a space for students to organize their questions that they could later attempt to answer with their notes.

Marianne and Alexis constructed their task not according to the goal of getting information for a later class assignment, but with the goal of completing the assignment by the end of this class. While neither Marianne nor Alexis explicitly stated why they wanted to complete this specific task within the confines of the class period, it became clear, through the rush that both students made to finish before the period was up, that they wanted to complete their work within the duration of class.

To say that this was the primary goal of the students is probably not accurate: the desire to finish their work within one class period was just one of several different goals they accomplished (or attempted to accomplish) through their actions with one another. The students also set themselves the task of understanding the material that they were examining. This becomes clear in their discussions of Helen Keller, one of the topics that the students were researching. Both Marianne and Alexis had trouble understanding how Keller—a blind, deaf woman—could communicate with people and write articles and books. In fact, there was some uncertainty of whether Helen Keller could speak at all, and the students worked their way to an understanding about that through a combination of reading, writing, and discussion while they were filling out the sheets.

Emily structured the task by dividing the students into groups according to the several hexagonal tables available within the library. Once the students were organized in this manner, Emily’s course structure took on the same generalized structure that I present above: Do Now – Review – Activity – Ticket Out. In this lesson, the “Do Now” consisted of directions for organizing student activity at the start of class (i.e., finding a seat, taking out paper, writing a heading). “Review” section of class involved a review of the sheets that students had to complete in class. The activity that students had to complete involved filling in the blue sheets indicated in the table above. When the students were finished with this activity, students had to hand in their sheets as a ticket out.

Emily’s students had further structuring according to the sheets that they had to fill in. Students were required to respond with a specific number of facts (between ten and fifteen—although Marianne and Alexis attempted 17) drawn from a limited set of resources (print and limited web) and they had to record those facts in the two dozen lines of space provided on

the blue sheet that Emily gave them. Marianne and Alexis took the sheets and directions provided by Emily as a starting point, but from there used the space of the classroom and their own needs for filling in the sheets to structure their activity. Emily did not specify that students could not work together, although she did not clearly encourage it, either. Instead, Marianne and Alexis took the opportunity of that lack of specific direction and used it to find a meeting point at one of the hexagonal tables, selected available books, and began completing the sheets together.

Emily structured participation in several ways. First, she did not exclude cooperating with other students in her directions, so students had the opportunity (if they so chose) to work together to complete their own sheets. Second, Emily provided students with the sheets that would, later, turn into their exit tickets. Student participation was then limited, with regard to writing, to the completion of a list of facts gleaned from various sources.

But writing was not the only way that students could participate in class. Emily structured the participation so that students could engage with the written texts or the electronic texts available through the school website. During this organization, students collaborated with one another in some ways (if only to exchange books or switch on and off from different computers) and also had the opportunity to discuss material with Emily or the librarian. Students, then, could participate in class by filling out what would be their exit tickets, sharing texts and computer resources, and discussing their progress with either the librarian or the instructor.

Marianne and Alexis engaged in participative actions by deciding to (1) work with print texts and (2) complete the blue sheet by using as many facts as possible. The number of facts that these students completed actually went well beyond the fifteen required by Emily at



the start of class: both Marianne and Alexis were able to fill their sheets completely, thus giving them more than the amount of information needed for them to participate in blog writing activities on these people later in the year. The students chose to participate through their blue sheets and their textbooks, and they were able to do so through coordinated activity with one another that led them to new understandings about the people they were reading about.

There is a plurality of sponsors of literacy working together within the literate act that Alexis and Marianne perform together. As indicated in the organization of literate acts in chapter four, however, these sponsors are shaped—are put into organization with other sponsors in order to accomplish various goals—by the actors in the classroom who talk, write, and act them into being at any particular locality. The leading sponsor—as organized by the assignment sheets that Emily made for this lesson (see Exposure 1), is the Common Core standards. At the beginning of the white sheet, Emily lists the standards that the students are working toward in this activity. These standards are supported by the other sponsors of literacy in the classroom: the school website, the resources that site connects to, the publishing companies behind the books in the library, and the funding that supports the library itself. These resources are all shaped and directed toward the standards on the white sheet via the descriptions by the teacher and the directions on the sheet.

Emily historicized the writing that the students are doing in this situation during her introduction and through her organization of the generalized class activity. This activity also fit into the larger unit on blog writing and the general theme of “What is an Upstander?” since the focus of the research was on identifying and describing Upstanders, as well as what it was that makes them Upstanders. This lesson came on the heels of several lessons that

discussed the issue of upstanders in society, related that discussion to literature that all students had read, and the nature of blogs and blog writing. When viewing the unit with a wide lens, this unit falls naturally along the trajectory of constructing researched blog entries about Upstanders. Emily discussed with students what Upstanders were and why they were Upstanders, provided them with tools to research various historical figures to see how they acted as Upstanders, and explained to students how they could take notes on those Upstanders so that they could write about it later.

This activity was structured heavily by Emily's own classroom management experiences, as well as her experiences with helping students conduct research. Emily had explained in several interviews that she had a difficult time getting students to conduct serious research with multiple sources. She even insisted that students could not even search on Google with efficiency, and that they often left resources untapped even when they engaged with the kinds of research they claimed to know how to do. Emily's structuring of classroom activity as well as her demands for student writing and research are all connected to her own past experiences of what had and had not worked for her.

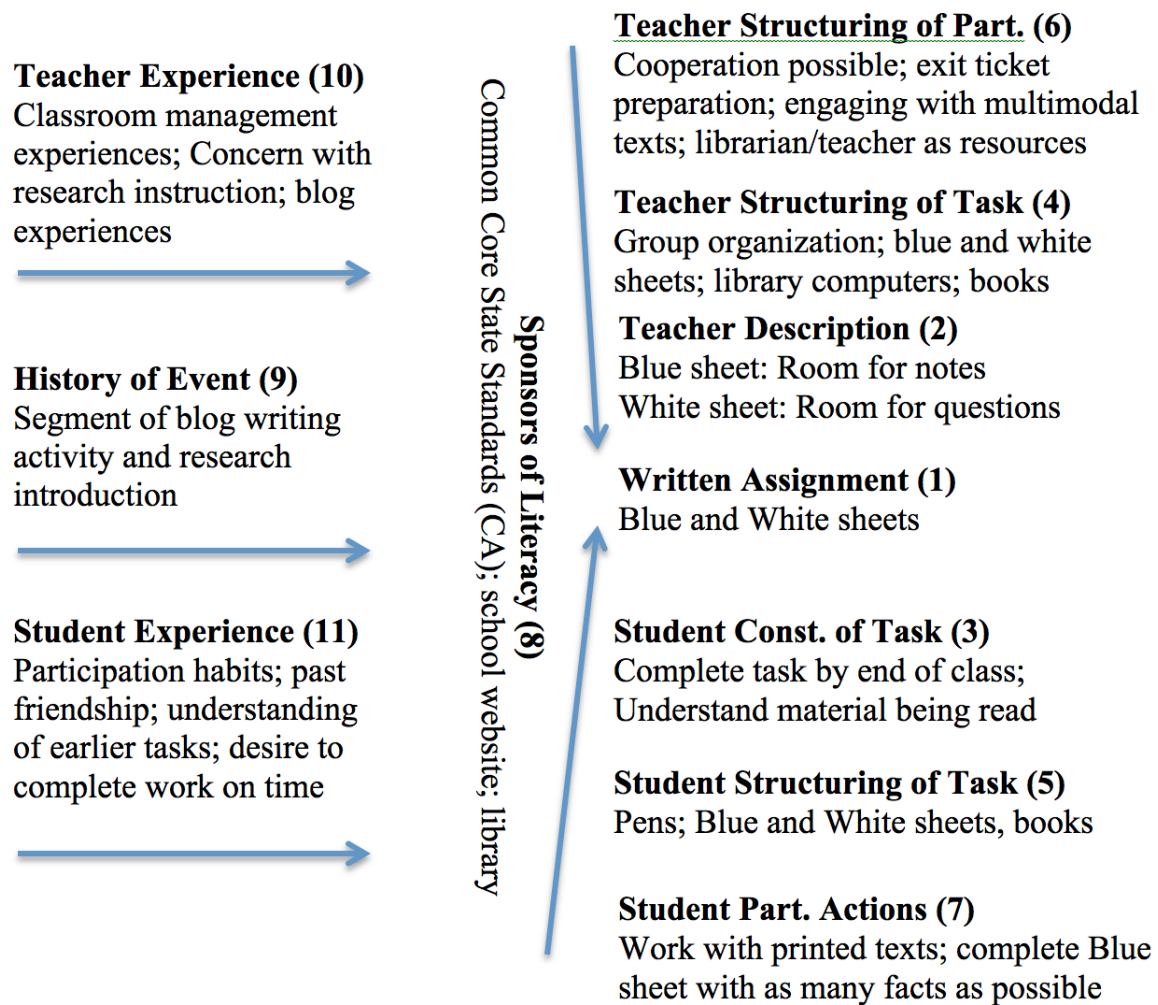
When interviewed about it, Emily showed little attention to the specific social construction of her classes (either fourth or fifth period), so presumably the social makeup of both classes was within her range of expectations for the learning, behavior, and activity of students in a seventh-grade language arts class. The organization of her class, then, was built from her previous experience introducing students to research and preparing them to write blog entries.

There are a great many student experiences brought into the classroom, and this particular exposure focuses on the experiences of Marianne and Alexis. Both of these

students were consistently successful students who participated regularly, were rarely off-task sufficiently enough to rouse the attention of Emily, and who seemed to understand how to succeed at the activities that they were attempting in class. The students also demonstrated—both in this activity and in others—a strong desire to complete assigned work in the time allotted. Their consistently successful student performance, their regular attempts to complete work in the designated time, and their understanding of the earlier tasks that were assigned helped these students make sense of their writing situations, ask the right questions, obtain the proper knowledge, and complete the task as assigned.

The figure below shows Marianne and Alexis building different purposes for writing among the talk, tools, and texts that they have to work within their exposures than Emily does. Rather than focus on the blog writing, Marianne and Alexis privilege getting their work done in a timely manner (i.e., before the end of class) and on understanding the material that they go about reading. Their purposes (which would fall under “Writing to Participate”) are not exactly at cross-purposes with Emily, since their work ends up “counting” for them in classroom activity, but it does indicate a gap in the mutually agreed-upon tasks that are established during research day in the library.

**Figure 5.10: Marianne and Alexis' Literate Act**



Each of the exposures, when blended together, provides a rich understanding of how each of the participants involved in the literate act that Marianne and Alexis performed understood their circumstances, as well as how they constructed material connections leading them into future literate acts. These students, together, constructed an interactional order that reproduced the appropriate elements of classroom activity (i.e., completing required work and doing so within the acknowledged rules of the library) while also using that interactional order to reach understandings that moved their writing activity forward in time. In this case, neither Alexis nor Marianne appeared to construct any kind of reorganized activity that they

could later repeat (although, after this interaction, Alexis and Marianne attempted to work together on future in-class projects with greater and greater regularity). Instead, they constructed texts, and these texts led them from the literate act they perform here to the literate acts they perform later, as they go about writing their blogs. The writing that they performed was, as is seen by their interaction with one another, an attempt to complete a worksheet for class. That this later served as a “Writing to Prepare” purpose went unacknowledged to the students at the time. Even though Emily, through the orchestrations of Exposures 1, 2, 4, and 6, encouraged preparing for blog writing, Marianne and Alexis, through Exposures 3, 5, and 7, never reference that activity, and instead draw from the structure of classroom writing activity what they are to do, when, and in what manner.

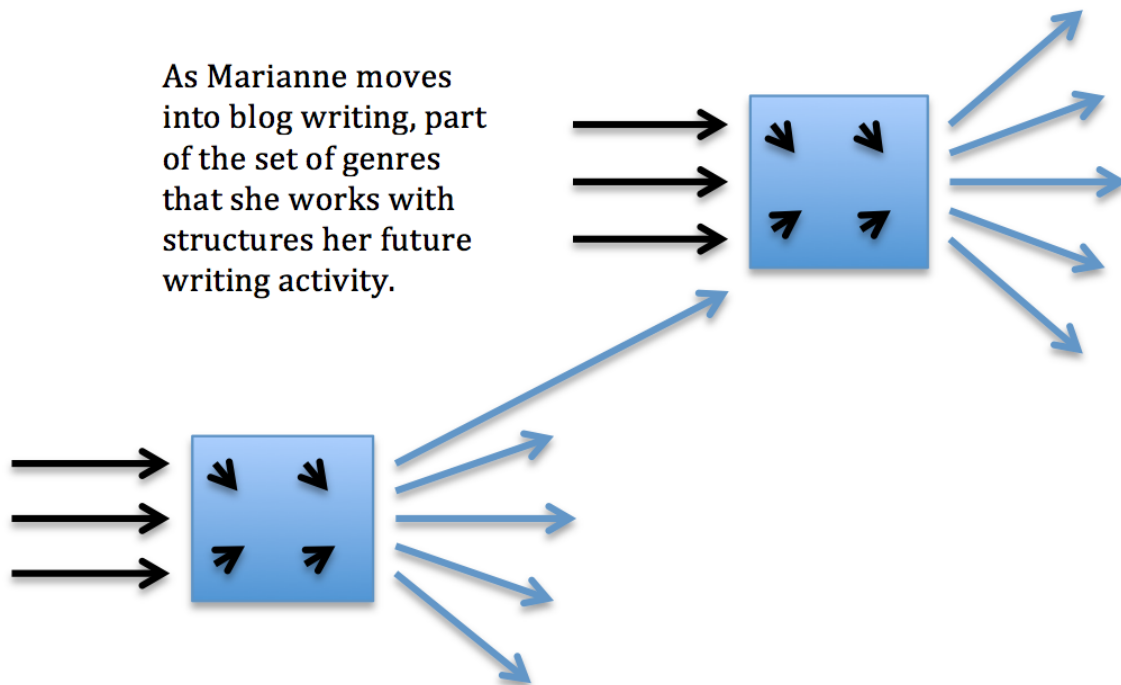
A strong example of the facts that they construct that later turn into a resource is their discussion of Helen Keller. Marianne, who focused her fact collection on Keller, became confused about her abilities. Uncertain about whether or not Keller could actually talk, Marianne discussed the issue with both Alexis and the librarian, and through that talk—along with references to other sources—determined that Keller did, indeed, teach herself to talk even though she was deaf.

This fact became a resource for Marianne when she was going about writing her blog post, and the fact came through a negotiation of meaning via talk, tools, and text with the librarian, Alexis, Marianne, and the texts available to all of them. This literate act, then, constructs a product that Marianne is able to use as a concise reference to the conversations that she had with Alexis and the librarian when she goes about writing her blog post.

Through the material connection of the genre set that Marianne and Alexis are writing, this

literate act carries forward and contributes to the later literate act of Marianne and Alexis's blog post construction.

**Figure 5.11: Marianne's Shift Via Genre Sets**



The graphic above shows Marianne's work during her literate act with Alexis carrying forward into her blog writing through the material connection of genre sets. Even though Marianne's initial purpose for writing is not aligned with Emily's purpose during the activity, she is able to use the sheets she writes on anyway during her blog writing activity. In essence, Marianne's work during the library research period prepares her to write her blog at a later date, even if her activity at the time did not lead her to think, talk, or act with that in mind. However, the work that she completes during this activity allows her to more deeply examine her subject matter, which leads to a more thorough blog post on her topic. This

leads Marianne to more carefully account for the multimodality of her blog (shown in a later exposure) that carries across multiple blog entries.

*Nick prepares his own definitions.* Before the students had begun research in preparation for their own blog writing activities, Emily used a novel the students had read (*The Outsiders*) to introduce students to the concept of an “Upstander,” a term used by students to examine characters in literature as well as their own actions (the term is paired with its opposite, a “bystander”). On January 22, Emily had her students develop definitions of several terms in preparation for an “Upstanding” blog writing unit: upstanders, bystanders, victims, and bullies. Using a mix of modalities and examples from *The Outsiders* to get all students on the same page, Emily tasked students with reaching definitions of the terms as the class discusses examples and characteristics of each term.

Emily passed out the sheet shown in the figure below to help students orient their writing activity with what she was asking them to do. Emily had students box the word “definition,” because she told students that they would be asked for that later on. Emily projected the sheet the students were working from on her television screen so that she could fill it in as they moved through it. Emily worked with the students through class discussion to come up with examples and characteristics of each term. Once examples were provided for each term, Emily gave students three minutes to write their own definition of the terms down.

Throughout these interlocking activities, Nick dutifully followed along. In the video, Nick can be seen writing down what the instructor asks him to write down, and using the time in between to interact with the students around him. This interaction manages to fly under Emily’s radar, as she only admonishes the students he interacts with, not him.

**Figure 5.12: Nick's Upstanding Worksheet**

<p><b>definition</b> a person who makes fun of or hurts someone else</p> <p><b>synonyms</b> jerk</p> <p><b>BULLY</b></p> <p><b>teacher's example scenario</b> student who point and laugh (others who laugh)</p> <p><b>traits/behaviors</b> from <i>The Outsiders</i> Bob T. Socs Dally Randy (early) Darryl</p>	<p><b>definition</b> a person who just doesn't participate in it.</p> <p><b>synonyms</b></p> <p><b>BYSTANDER</b></p> <p><b>teacher's example scenario</b> kid who just listens</p> <p><b>traits/behaviors</b> from <i>The Outsiders</i> other socs teacher (f)</p>
<p><b>definition</b> someone who is affected by something bad</p> <p><b>synonyms</b></p> <p><b>VICTIM</b></p> <p><b>teacher's example scenario</b> kid who is teased</p> <p><b>traits/behaviors</b> from <i>The Outsiders</i> Johnny Ponyboy</p>	<p><b>definition</b></p> <p><b>synonyms</b></p> <p><b>UPSTANDER</b></p> <p><b>teacher's example scenario</b> Person behind him who defended</p> <p><b>traits/behaviors</b> from <i>The Outsiders</i> Cherry Johnny Ponyboy</p>

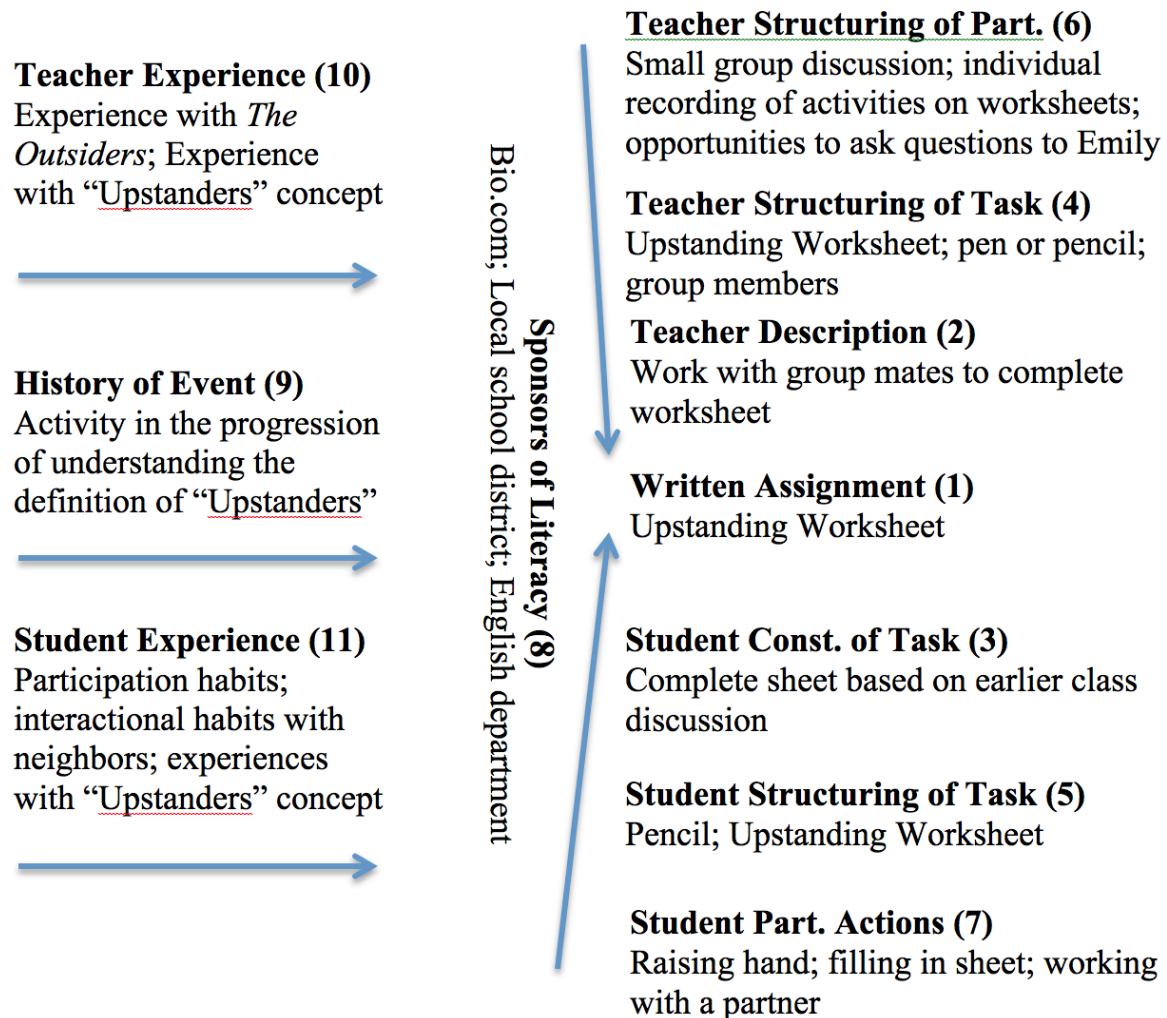
Nick's interactions with others do not keep him from participating actively in class in ways that "count," according to the class, as participation. Nick raises his hand on occasion when the teacher asks a question (though he is not called upon), and, as mentioned earlier, dutifully writes down what the teacher asks him to. Furthermore, near the end of class, when Emily asks students to define each of the terms at the end of class, Nick defines three of them. The final definition, that of an "Upstander," is written under the "teacher's example scenario," and Emily's attempted exit ticket out (which was to define an "Upstander") was cut short by the ringing bell.

During this lesson, Nick engages in several literate acts, but it is most beneficial for our purposes to focus on the final three minutes of the activity, when Nick draws from his



available notes to write definitions about each term. During this sequence, which takes approximately three minutes, Emily gives students the chance to work with others in their group—Nick has two others in his group—in order to come up with definitions and, if possible, synonyms for each.

**Figure 5.13: Nick's Literate Act**



Despite Emily’s exhortations to “work together!,” Nick only engages with one of his group members. Although he does listen in as Emily gives some clarifying examples to a group near him early on in his writing, most of what he writes under each “definition” emerges from talk with the neighbor to his immediate right as he works through the first two

terms. By the time he has finished writing on his sheet, however, his partner has left to speak with Emily at the front of the room, leaving Nick by himself to finish the writing. Of course, Nick's limited interactions with others about the terms do not limit his discussion. In fact, he has several turns at talk with people in other groups, most notably Alexis, who is located several rows of desks closer to the front of the classroom than he is.

As shown in the figure above, Nick works through the tools and structures provided by the teacher to complete the work that he is assigned during class. At no point does he refuse to do work, contradict the teacher, or otherwise work against the purpose of this particular writing activity. This is not to say, however, that Nick fails to go about this writing in his own way. In fact, Nick is able to structure his literate activity around his interactions with others so that he both accomplishes the goals of the writing activity and works through his own social agenda.

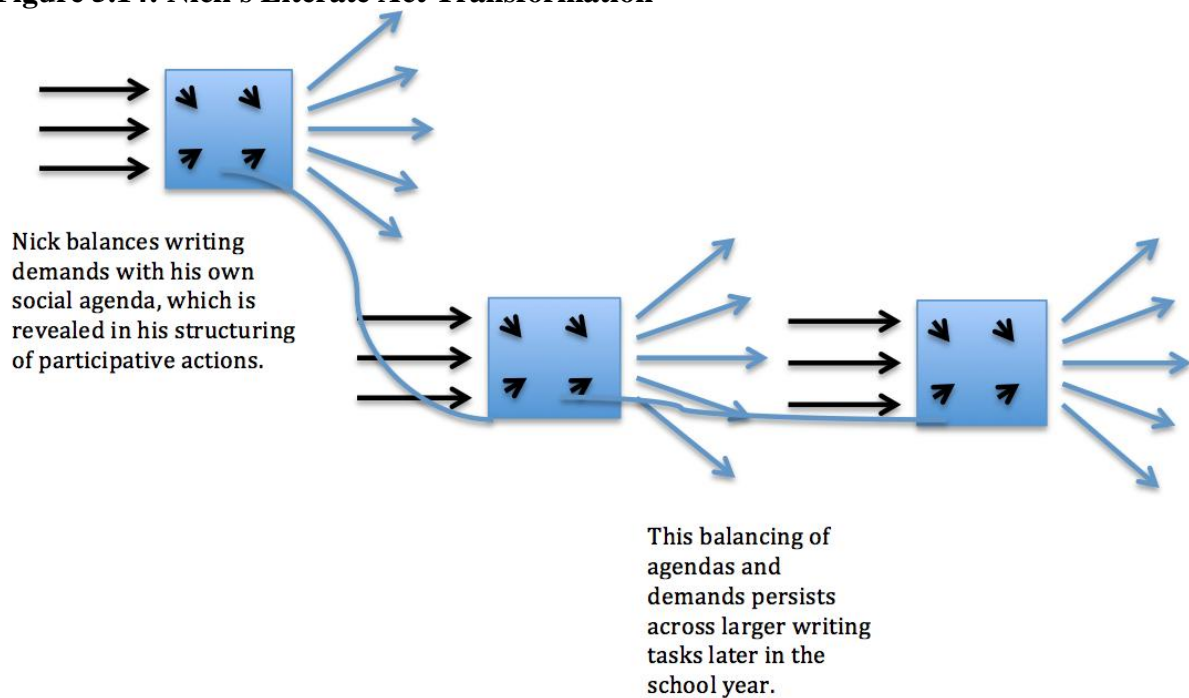
Nick's writing emerges as a series of preparations: he follows his instructor in taking notes so that he can later write definitions, which are in turn a preparation for prewriting about his blog entries. In each of these writing incidents, however, Nick manages to complete his assigned work while, at the same time, interacting with his fellow students. This echoes Dyson's (2013) findings that students write with the official curriculum through the extra work of unofficial practices in the classroom. Provided with the talk, tools, and text by Emily through Exposures 1, 2, 4, and 6, as well as the sponsors of literacy in Exposure 8, Nick constructs his task, structures his activity, and elects to participate in ways that allow his activity to "count" in the classroom while also engaging and building social relationships with his peers. However, as he completes what is "Writing to Prepare" activity in Emily's eyes, he engages in "Writing to Participate" activity in his own eyes. While the definitions of

these terms are important for later writing activity, it is at no point clear that Nick is considering that later writing activity while he engages in this task. Nick writes on his sheet and organizes his talk so that the work assigned to him is completed, but at no time does he step away from the issue at hand (i.e., filling in the worksheet) to consider the larger issues to which this preparation is attached.

This is not to say that what Nick does is any way wrong or incomplete, of course. Rather, Nick writes in a way that meets the demands of the classroom while, at the same time, allowing him to engage in the unofficial social features of class. Nick's social interactions with his peers align with the expectations of the classroom writing task, a balancing act he has been able to pull off throughout the school year. His process of defining these terms have created intertextual branches for him that emerge from this situation, a particularly important move since the class will be discussing "Upstanders" in some variation for several more months. These changes in the conceptual underpinnings of an "Upstander," however, do not immediately influence writing activity: rather, they are the developmental steps that Emily was looking for when she created this "Writing to Prepare" activity to begin with. Furthermore, the final, finished product that Nick creates will be useful for him when he creates other "Upstander"-focused texts later in the year.

Figure 5.14 shows how Nick's increasing balancing of social and academic phenomena in the classroom transform his literate act construction through the exposure of student participative actions (i.e., Exposure 7). Nick's organization of literate acts both creates and limits possibilities, and these limits and possibilities are highlighted through Nick's continued use of this balancing act in later, more extensive writing pieces.

**Figure 5.14: Nick's Literate Act Transformation**



A good example of Nick's later "Upstander"-focused writing can be seen below.

Nick's definitions of bully, victim, and bystander (as well as his tentative and contextually situated definition of "upstander" on the page) help him, later in the quarter, demonstrate his understanding of an "Upstander" with two examples: Spongebob Squarepants and Mother Teresa. His definition of "Upstander"—"someone who helps other people out when they are in need"—echoes his rough earlier definition, and the rushed comparison of Spongebob to Mother Teresa echoes the activity that we see him engaging in in the computer lab—the same kind of back-and-forth that he engages in during this "Writing to Prepare" stage.

Nick's concept of "Upstander" has carried with him beyond the literate act of filling in his definitions, and his activity for going about acting on that concept has carried forward as well. By balancing his work in the classroom with his interactions among his classmates, and by keeping his interactions focused away from the act of writing, Nick's understanding and

application of the concept “Upstander” lacks sufficient nuance and flexibility for him to build upon it in later writing activity.

**Figure 5.15: Nick's Upstanders Blog**



Marianne, Alexis, and Nick have all created material connections (i.e., texts, intertextual links) that will help them with the next writing assignment in their units as they “Prepare to Write.” In these ways, then, all three students have written in accordance with Emily’s purposes, even if those purposes were approached in somewhat oblique ways. Each of these students also supported their existing structures of determining writing activity in their arrangement of social interactions. Marianne and Alexis worked with one another to accomplish their tasks, and Nick was able to balance his social interactions with his work in order to accomplish his task. In short, all three students “Wrote to Prepare” for their next writing assignments in ways that provided them with materials that, going forward, would make their writing easier. The material artifacts created in “Writing to Prepare” activities were significantly more substantial in terms of time and effort than the “Writing to Organize”

texts, which were useful without being textually substantial. “Writing to Perform,” the next purpose on the list, provides significantly more text and, with it, significantly more opportunity for shifted writing activity.

**Table 5.5: Key "Writing to Prepare" Takeaways**

Key Takeaways from These “Writing to Prepare” Acts
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students and teachers can organize writing for different purposes without working directly at odds with one another.</li> <li>2. Sponsors of literacy work together to shape specific writing activities within a classroom.</li> <li>3. A lack of connection to the larger understandings of writing activities can inhibit students from seeing the larger writing picture of which they are part.</li> <li>4. Individual student purposes for writing powerfully shape writing activity and, as a result, writing activity development.</li> <li>5. Changes in writing activity can be uneven, and move among many different kinds of writing as long as the material connections are present.</li> </ol>

**Writing to perform.** While each and every act a person engages in can be considered a performance in some way (i.e., Goffman), “Writing to Perform” is a specific kind of grade-based activity in Emily’s classroom, and thus can be separated from other purposes for which students write. When Emily organized an activity that allowed students to “Write to Perform” (in her eyes, of course), she had a specific audience, a specific act, and a specific intention in mind.

“Writing to Perform” may seem similar to “Writing to Prepare,” since the preparation that students engaged in often ended up as performance. However, students who wrote to prepare were constructing texts that served, for them, as tools of that performance, rather than constituting a performance. This small difference is crucial because of the changes in writing activity that occur as a result of it. When students are given a structured activity with the “Writing to Perform” purpose as central, the structuring itself looks vastly different than the kinds of structure provided to Nick, Marianne, and Alexis above. In fact, the work of

Marianne and Holly below, which show their process of constructing a blog entry for the purpose of performance, indicates many changes in the way that they organized their work.

***Blog writing in Emily's classroom.*** Emily's blog writing unit brings together the many different threads teased out by the "Do Now" activity, the reflective activities, and the discussion activities. Emily's students go about writing blogs on a regular basis and for many reasons. While doing so, they also engage in the writing process in many different ways and for many different purposes. Essentially, the blog writing unit engages students in all seven purposes for writing at some point or another during the unit, and most of those kinds of writing also trigger future kinds of writing as the unit continues to unfold. An analysis of the blog writing unit can identify how literate acts orchestrate multiple exposures at the same time while using those exposures to create the material connections that string multiple literate acts together.

Emily's blog writing unit followed her "What is Greatness?" unit, and was actually titled the "What Makes an Upstander?" unit, a subject that the English teachers had agreed upon earlier in the year. This was part of a larger "Upstanders versus Bystanders" theme, which Emily wanted to use to spur discussions about what to do when witnessing a wrong being committed. Drawing from a variety of books, stories, articles, and videos, Emily constructed a unit that asked students what makes a good upstander. The unit packet from this course consisted of eight different handouts totaling 120 points for the course. During the course of this unit, Emily's students performed three major tasks: they conducted a "Socratic Seminar;" they constructed "Little-Big Commitments;" and they set up and began writing in their blogs.

The blogs were known as “Upstanding Blogs,” and were constructed via a classroom-friendly blogging website that enabled Emily to restrict access to the blogs. Only students, Emily, Emily’s principal, Emily’s student teacher, and myself had access to the blogs at first. After the students had published several blogs, their parents and guardians were invited to read the blogs and make comments as they wished. The blogs were written over an extended period of time both in class and out of class, and with pencil and paper, iPads, and desktop computers.

Emily began her “Upstanding Blog” unit in late January. On January 28, Emily’s students signed an agreement to follow the blogging rules that Emily had set up for them. The blogging activity that occurred on the site ran through April. During that time, Emily’s students wrote between three and four blog entries. These entries were reviewed by Emily before publication, and were edited once more before Emily invited parents to the site. This blogging activity was connected to the classroom activity that students engaged in in different ways, and each blogging assignment provided students with the opportunity to engage in a variety of literate acts.

The blogging assignments that students wrote are listed below. The dates assigned to these blogs are references to their final product, not the process of writing them. Each blogging assignment was constructed over an extended period of time leading up to the final publication.

**Table 5.6: Blogging Assignments**

<b>Blog Number</b>	<b>Blog Assignment</b>	<b>Publication Date</b>
1	Little-Big Commitment	January 28, 2014
2	What is an Upstander?	January 30, 2014



3	Who is an Upstander?	February 20, 2014
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Each of these blog publications had a fairly long turnaround, with the exception of the “Little-Big Commitment,” a publication that was by far the shortest publication of all of the blogs. The “Little-Big Commitment” was the first blog post for Emily’s students, and Emily used the blog as an opportunity to work out any technical difficulties stemming from the blog site itself or the sometimes-dated technology that Emily had to rely upon.

The blog writing activities were not isolated activities: students discussed their topics, conducted some preliminary research, wrote rough drafts on paper, sent tentative blog posts to Emily for review, and made changes based on her comments before posting their final drafts. Furthermore, students had their publications commented on after posting and, occasionally, replied to those comments. Each of these activities, as mentioned before, took place at different locations, with different technology. Students sometimes wrote on pencil and paper, sometimes on desktops, and sometimes on iPads. Their tool availability was determined by Emily’s selection of limited resources. Since Emily believed that students did not write well on computers for first drafts, most of the writing that students did at the start of the activity was on pencil and paper. After students had some initial writing completed, Emily provided as many opportunities for writing on the blog site as possible. However, since the school only had one computer lab, one library, and two iPad carts, Emily had to negotiate her students’ writing around the opportunities that were presented to her through the school’s infrastructure.

As the students went about writing their blogs, they were provided with several opportunities to revise what they were saying before it was published. They received some feedback from Emily before publication, of course—in fact, they even received feedback

from Emily after publication, as the students were preparing their blogs for viewing by parents. However, even without Emily's feedback, students were presented with several changes to revise what they wrote, if only because they were translating their writing from one document to another: from sheets of paper to the internet.

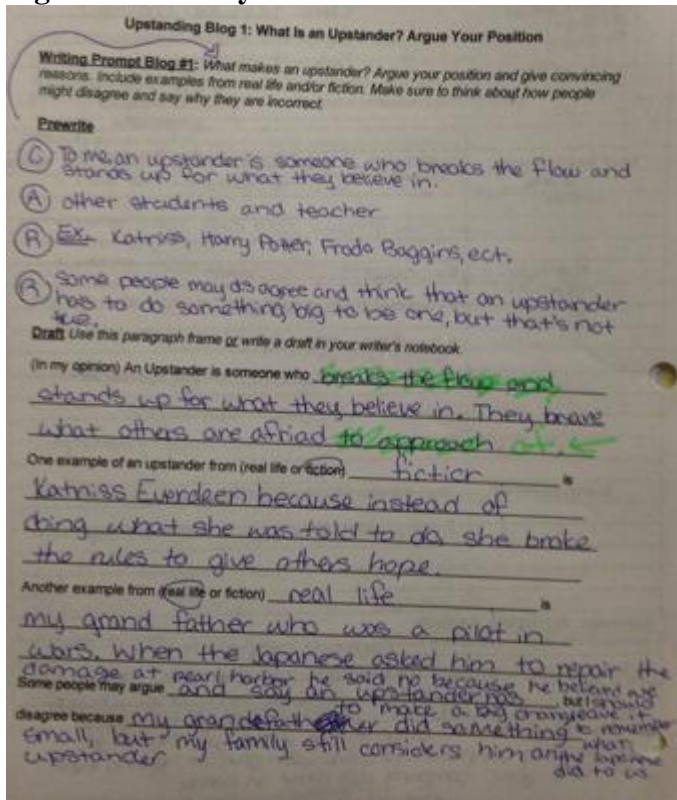
However, not all students took advantage of this opportunity. When reviewing some student writing, it appears that the writing on the page and the writing on the site is hardly different at all – some spelling issues are corrected, and some grammatical problems resolved, but otherwise the writing from one situation to another remains the same. Some students, such as Clarence, clearly did not write a first draft before publishing online, so, for him, there was no opportunity for revision at all.

Many students, though, did take advantage of this. In particular, Holly used the rewriting as an opportunity to put the community value of sentence variety to work. A comparison of her rough draft to her final draft reveals a careful attention to the structure of the sentences she put together, as well as a clear connection to some of the sentence structures that she engaged with during the “Do Now” activities throughout the school year. For Holly, the rewriting became an opportunity to engage more powerfully with community values, an opportunity that she openly noted during one of her interviews.

***Holly's blog writing developmental moment.*** Holly's writing activity toward blog construction can be traced across several lessons, but it is perhaps easiest to see how Holly orchestrated her writing activity starting with two finished projects and identifying a literate act that brings both together. The figure below shows Holly's first draft of a blog entry for her “What is an Upstander?” blog entry. In this draft, Holly's writing is constrained by several factors. First, Emily has provided students with various sentence frames to shape

their writing. While this is not necessarily a problem for students (in fact, many students use these as guides for their writing), it does limit some of the options that Holly has when she engages in writing. Second, Holly only has a limited amount of space for her entry: it is limited to a single page, and her answer to the “What is an Upstander?” question is broken into several pieces, each of which has a limited space to be described.

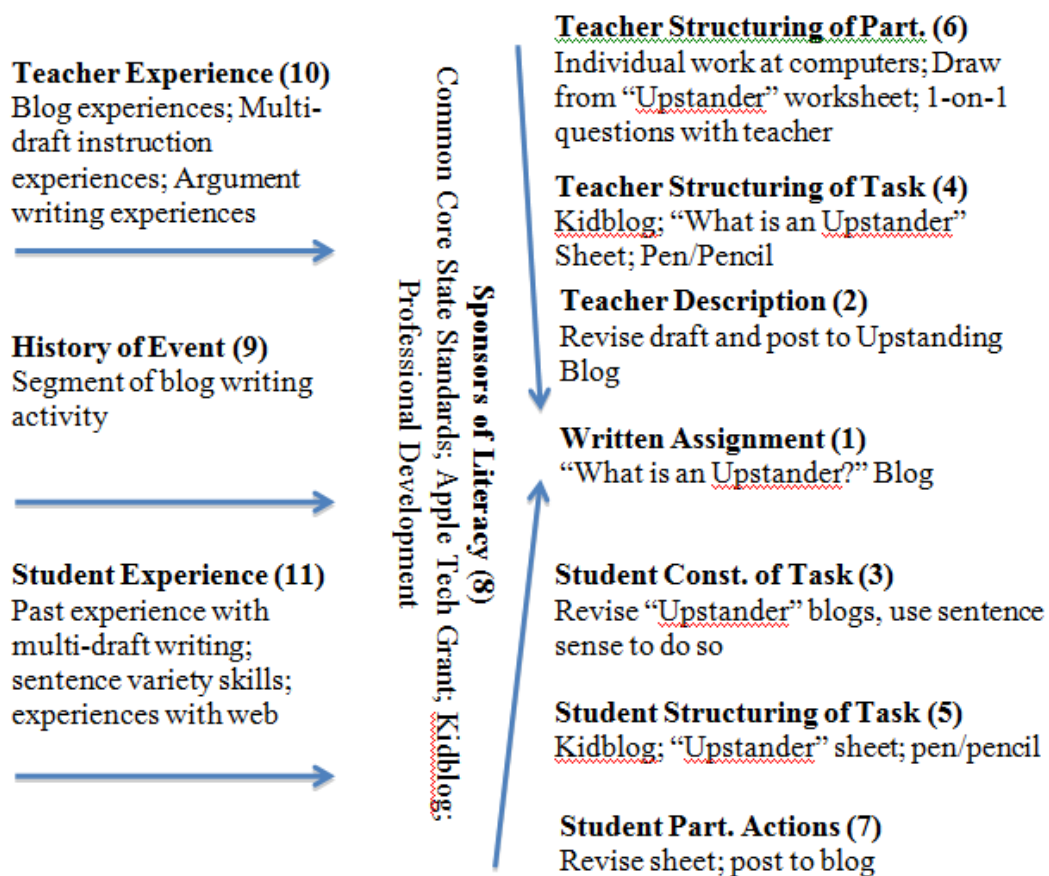
**Figure 5.16: Holly's Initial Draft**



These limitations disappear for Holly in her blog post, but that does not necessarily mean that the prior limitations on writing will not direct the writing that Holly does. Indeed, as can be seen in the screen capture of Holly’s “What is an Upstander?” post below, the writing that students do is often carried over from the rough drafts in a largely unchanged form. Holly, of course, made some changes—changes related to the community value of sentence variety—but the basic structure of the piece remains unchanged.

Emily's initial structures on the writing of the "What is an Upstander?" blog, then, heavily impacted how Holly's eventual final draft looked. By and large, Holly applied her rough draft to her final draft. The changes that she made were the result of her keeping the community value of sentence variety in mind. Holly also displayed a conscious awareness of this decision-making, as she mentioned it during one of her one-on-one interviews with me. Figure 5.17 describes the literate act that carried Holly's writing from draft to blog.

**Figure 5.17: Holly's Blog Writing Literate Act**



In the literate act of Holly revising her blog post for publication above, note that the exposures indicate how Holly works her way from the initial blog draft, shown earlier, to the final blog publication shown below. The literate act described in figure 5.17 show that Holly is, through her construction of the task, understanding the role of "sentence sense" or a

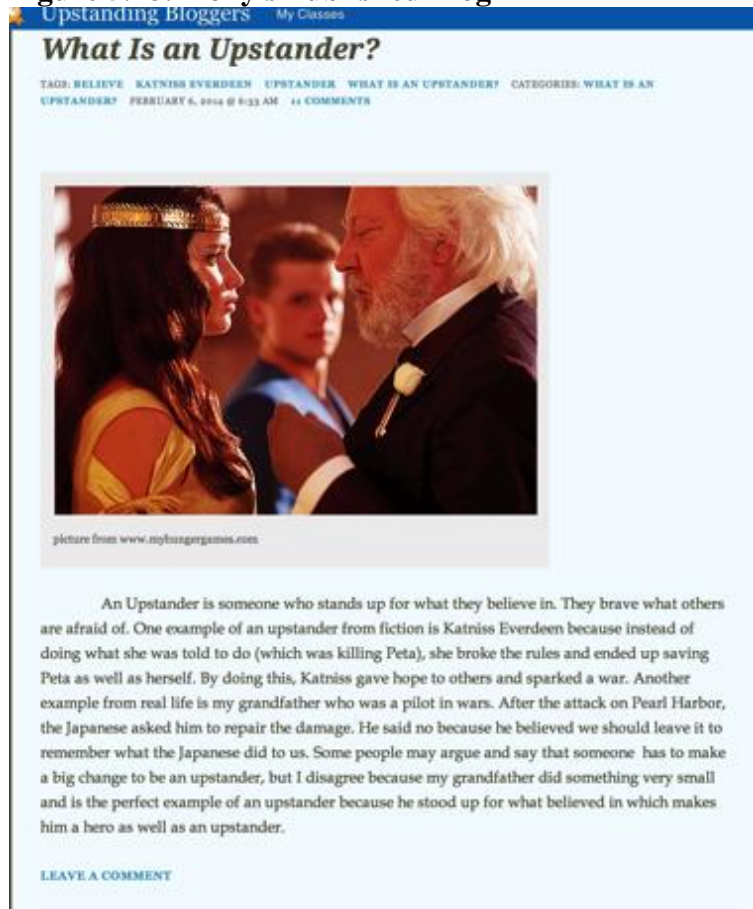
community value of the power and utility of sentence variety, in order to drive the work that she is doing. This concept of sentence sense emerges from past interactions with Emily, who promotes sentence variety throughout the school year. Holly's take up of it in this instance can be seen not just through the changed sentence structures in the final product, but in the way that Holly makes sense of her revising opportunities in her actions and her explanations of those actions via interview. During an interview in which she describes her blog writing process, Holly references the "Do Now" activities, claiming that she "likes to use the S-V splits and stuff" when she is writing in order to "surprise" her audience (i.e., Emily) with her sentence structures. Holly carries her understanding of sentence sense into her blog writing process and transforms her publication through her understanding and application of that community value.

Holly's work on her blog post indicates the ways in which students can take advantage of revision opportunities and, by doing so, change the orchestration of their activities during the construction of literate acts. It also indicates the power that classroom discussion, classroom structure, and instructional structure has on the subsequent writing activity that develops in students. Although students may take parts of the social structure of the class in very different ways at times, by and large the ways in which a classroom structures activity directs how the final writing piece will turn up. The understandings that are talked into being through the interactional work of students and teachers act as lenses. These lenses are actually tools—both psychological and physical—that writers think through to determine writing activity and shape final written products.

Holly's finished blog, as shown in the figure below, represents a small step forward in the textual development of Holly's writing, but a large step forward in the way that the

assemblage of conscious and habitual activity is organized around and for the act of writing. That is, Holly has taken a large step (i.e., incorporating sentence variety into her writing) in her organization of the talk, tools, and texts around her, even if this step has not made itself more powerfully known on the publication itself. In the end, Holly adds 31 words in the form of two simple sentences and two opening modifying phrases, in addition to some smaller additions and deletions throughout the 149-word document. However, this small shift in writing opens up myriad possibilities for future writing as Holly becomes more comfortable working with sentence structure and manipulating it further toward her own ends.

**Figure 5.18: Holly's Published Blog**



Holly's literate act shows a transition from one draft of writing to another, and shows how both (1) new conceptions about writing work their way into the construction of a text and (2)

how faint or strong those new conceptions can be when they show up on a final product. As we will see, this kind of deliberate application of a community value is just one of many ways that a shift can work its way into the writing activity of a person.

***Marianne's developmental blog moment.*** Holly is not the only student to engage in multi-draft writing, of course. Marianne, who was last seen shifting her orchestrations of writing to accommodate the “blue sheet” of her library research, takes advantage of multi-draft writing as well, although it is clear from her final product that she did not take advantage of the opportunity as powerfully as Holly did. Through her shifts from the blue sheet to a rough draft of a CARR argument form on a sheet provided by Emily to a final, posted draft, Marianne takes advantage of the different writing opportunities to refine her final product. In each of these drafts, Marianne can be seen taking advantage of the reflective opportunities offered her by the new draft and refining her word choice, sentence structure, and overall argument.

These differences indicate a different awareness of the writing that Marianne had earlier constructed. Marianne's reflection on her own writing is something of a backward gaze: as she engages in the act of writing with a slightly different interactional order (i.e., using her older draft as a tool in her new draft), Marianne can think about writing differently, the executive functions of her memory can step back from her writing attempts, and she has the cognitive capacity to consider making changes that she earlier may not have noticed.

**Figure 5.19: Marianne's Helen Keller Draft**

ARGUMENT ESSAY TEMPLATE WITH C.A.R.B. (Eng7CP / McMillan)

**TITLE:** Helen Keller is an Upstander

**Introduction Paragraph with your Clear Position.**  
Start with a hook or attention-grabbing beginning to get your Audience's attention. Give a brief (1-2 sentence) summary of the issue. State your clear position from step one (also called a thesis statement).

**Hook:** Helen Keller fights back and overtake a little bit even though she is deaf and blind.

**Position:** My definition of an upstander is someone who influences others in a positive way, and accomplishes great things in life.

(Name) Helen Keller is an upstander because she keeps on trying even with disabilities that make it almost impossible to do the things that she does.

**Body Paragraph(s) with Convincing Reasons**  
Use your supporting points from research. For each convincing reason, write 1-3 sentences that provide additional details. Cite the source of your evidence.

First, according to the (book / website / encyclopedia / article) book by (author) Connecish Helen Keller learns 5-6 new words and says them even when deaf and blind. (p. 7)

This demonstrates how it is very difficult to do that but Helen Keller does it anyway.

(Optional) Also, the same source says that she gets frustrated at herself and thinks that she is not doing it but she keeps trying to do it anyway.

This shows that this is a miracle and Helen Keller wants to accomplish this

**Body Paragraph(s) Continued**

Second, according to the (book / website / encyclopedia / article) website by (author) Bio.com Helen Keller attended a college and graduated in 1904. (p. 1)

This demonstrates how even though she has "handicap" (illness that makes you deaf blind), she still made it through college.

(Optional) In addition, the same source says \_\_\_\_\_ (p. 1)

This shows how she is a miracle worker and is very intelligent.

**Rebuttal / Acknowledge the Other Side**  
Explain why you think the opposing point of view is wrong.

**Rebuttal:** Some people think that it is easy and a lot of people have disabilities so this is a very hard thing to do but they are wrong because Helen Keller does what people without disabilities do. Even when deaf blind.

**Conclusion Paragraph**  
Write 2-3 sentences to remind your reader of your convincing reasons. Finish with a strong sentence. Try a call to action. Tell the reader what you want him or her to do.

(Name) Helen Keller is an upstander because she doesn't give up even when there are hard.

I (recommend that people / call for people to / advise people to) advise people to understand that Helen Keller is a true miracle worker and definitely an upstander.



Marianne underscores what was seen in the changes across drafts that Holly performed: as writing is orchestrated differently across various literate act moments, writers can zero their attention in to different aspects of their writing and, as a result, craft their messages differently. This is not, of course, a given: some students merely translated their work from the page to the internet and moved on. However, work across drafts and across modes provides that opportunity.

**Figure 5.20: Marianne's Finished Blog Post**

Helen Keller wrote many books and even talked while deaf and blind. My definition of an upstander is someone who influences others in a positive way and accomplishes great things in her life. Helen Keller is an upstander because she keeps on trying even with disabilities that make it almost impossible to do the things that she did.

6 new words and even said them while deaf and blind. This demonstrates how it is very difficult to do this but she doesn't give up. Also, the same source says that she became frustrated at herself and threw tantrums but she will keep on trying no matter what. This shows how Helen Keller is a miracle worker and wants to accomplish this.

Second, according to the website "Bio.com", Helen Keller attended a college and graduated in 1904. This demonstrates how even though she has "brain fever" (illness that made her deaf and blind), she still made it through college.

Some people may think that it is easy and a lot of people have disabilities so this one person isn't a big deal, but they are wrong because Helen Keller does what people without her disabilities do even when she can't see or hear.

Helen Keller is an upstander because she doesn't give up even when times are hard. I advise people to read her books and understand that Helen Keller is definitely an upstander and is extremely intelligent.

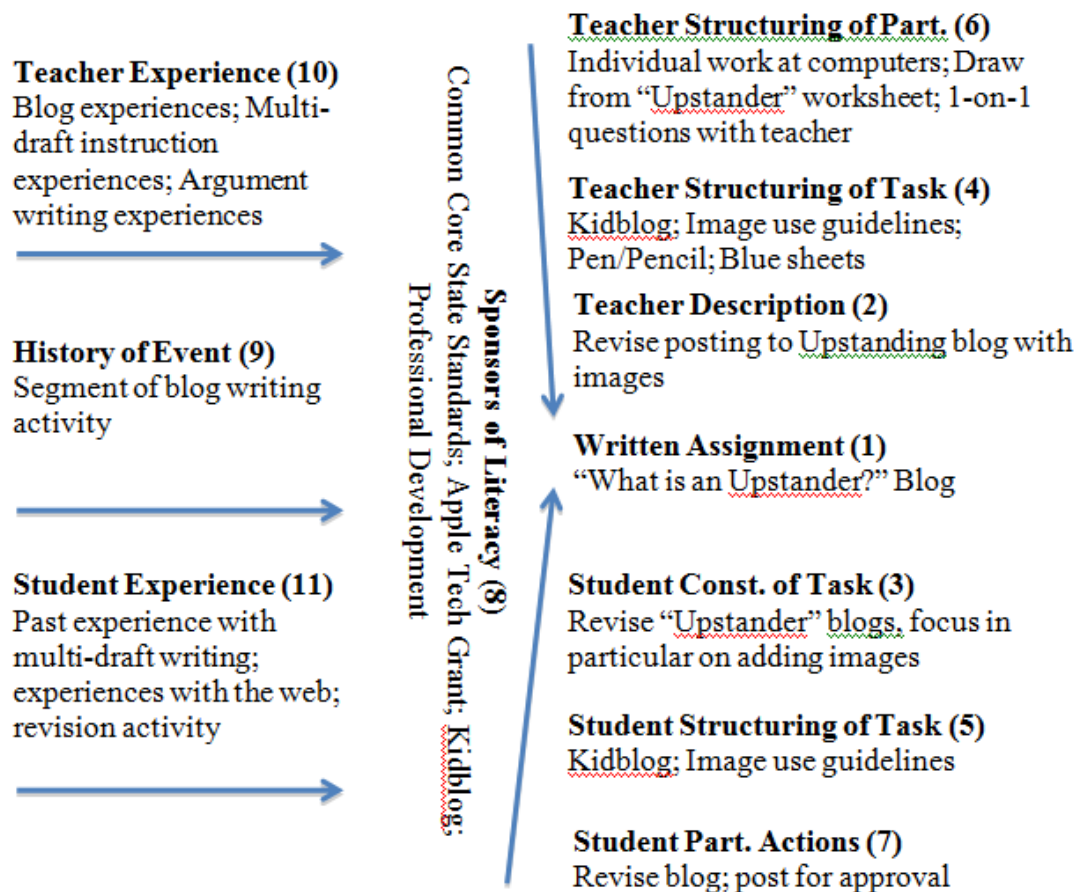


Image from: "globalresearch.com"



The figure below captures the awareness of revision that increased in Marianne as she moved through the process of adding images to her blog posts. The idea of adding images to a blog post brought the issue of revision into sharp relief within the greater process of writing a blog entry, as students were unable to add these pictures in their initial writing. Guided by Emily’s instructions and their own subject matter, students such as Marianne added images to their texts for a variety of purposes. It is within this addition process that students’ awareness of the ongoing process of revision could be heightened, and where Marianne was able to build on her earlier genre set connections to understand that texts can be returned to for refinement as a regular course of writing activity.

**Figure 5.21: Marianne Revises Her Blog**



In this literate act, Marianne takes advantage of the tools available to her to create a revised blog post with the pictures (seen in the images above) to further detail her blog post. These additions, while hardly rhetorical in nature (they were added to the end of the blog, rather than used as an avenue for argument in the blog itself), still serve as a starting point for understanding a written text as something to be returned to again and again for addition, deletion, and revision. This idea of toying with a draft, brought forward by the opportunity to add images and video, carries forward into future blog writing activities and, to a lesser extent, the more extended writing activities that Marianne finds herself in later in the course.

***Rachel prepares her “What is an Upstander?” blog.*** Rachel, like Holly and Marianne, also used the transition from rough to final draft to increase the quality of her performance. Much like Holly, Rachel’s first draft was highly structured by the framework that Emily provided to her students. Although Rachel had the option of filling out a draft in her “Writer’s Notebook,” which would have given her more freedom of structure, Rachel chose to use the sheet shown in the figure below.

The literate act focused on, in this case, is the one that shifts Rachel’s writing from the rough draft to the final draft, as Rachel engages in “Writing to Perform” for her blog publication. This literate act can highlight the changes that Rachel’s writing goes through as she engages in the move from written draft to final publication, and identifies the changing patterns of writing that sustain themselves over the course of future writing moments.

In the next few pages, I present Rachel’s rough and final drafts, indicate the changes that went on between each one, and present that in the literate act graphic used in the above analysis. This graphic will indicate what happened in this transition while also pointing to

connections that this literate act has with the literate activity that follows in Rachel's future writing.

**Figure 5.22: Rachel's Rough Draft**

Upstanding Blog 1: What is an Upstander? Argue Your Position

**Writing Prompt Blog #1:** What makes an upstander? Argue your position and give convincing reasons. Include examples from real life and/or fiction. Make sure to think about how people might disagree and say why they are incorrect.

**Prewrite**

① Someone who does something about a problem they disagree with

② Other student + teacher

③ MLK, Hilah, Justice, Robin, Gandhi

④ Some people may disagree because... however...

**Draft** Use this paragraph frame or write a draft in your writer's notebook.

(In my opinion) An Upstander is someone who does something about a  
problem that they disagree with.

One example of an upstander from (real life or fiction) real life is  
Bob Marley because he tried to spread the message  
of being able to both country and being free.

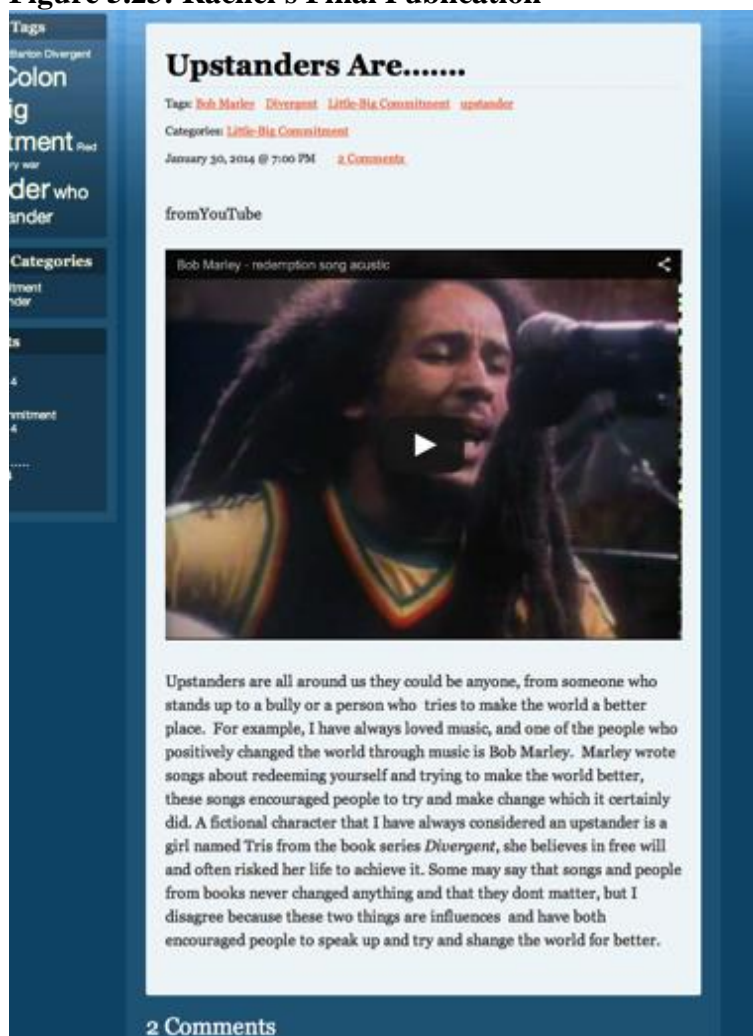
Another example from (real life or fiction) fiction is  
Eris Prior from Divergent because she fights against  
what she thinks is wrong by risking her life to stop people from being control.

Some people may argue that a country is a country and a single person can't but I  
disagree because both these people are influential on people  
and encourage them to do the right thing and in a way that  
try to see people's reality and fight for it.

Significant differences, however, emerge when looking at Rachel's final draft. While Holly used the material connection of the "sentence variety" community value to alter her writing, Rachel did not openly acknowledge that as a motivating factor in her blog writing work, nor did her sentence structures seem to indicate it. Her draft, however, did endure some significant changes from first draft to publication, and they were changes significantly different from Holly's. While Holly did, indeed, change her sentence structures, she did not

significantly alter the overall structure of her text. Her transitions, the headers to her sentences, and her conjunctions remained the ones that Emily suggested. Rachel, on the other hand, used the options that Emily gave them in those places only as a starting point. Throughout Rachel's final draft, significant changes can be seen in the sentence structure of her transitions, and her own word choice also undergoes some serious changes, even if the structure does remain the same.

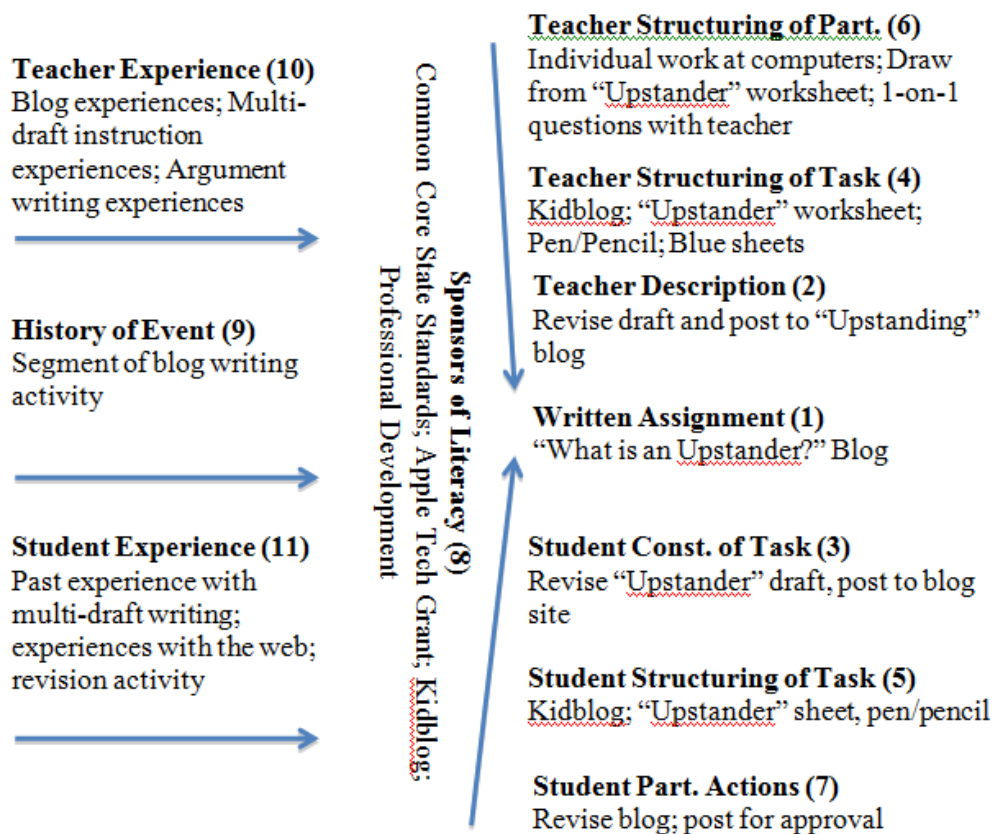
**Figure 5.23: Rachel's Final Publication**



In a comparison of the two drafts, Rachel shows clear attempts to use synonyms, rephrased sentences (albeit with similar structures), and even additional claims for her final

draft. These changes indicate an orchestrated set of activities of which the rough draft is one part. During her process of writing her final blog entry, Rachel used the rough draft as a tool to guide her writing, but this tool was used in conjunction with other information—including Rachel’s internalized understandings of writing—to help her write a final draft. The final draft also includes multimodal approaches to representing material on the page, just as the work of Holly and Marianne did.

**Figure 5.24: Rachel's Literate Act**



Notice that the exposures in this blog look, for the most part, largely similar to the exposures in the other literate acts pictured above, but that, through the participative actions and structuring of tasks, Rachel was able to create a text that differed in many ways from what Holly and Marianne wrote. Rachel, in her transition from one draft to another, uses her previous writing as a general guide for engaging with later drafts. Rather than draw from the

tightly framed drafts guided by Emily, Rachel sets about her own transformation of her writing process. Since her multi-draft writing before this had been limited, this shift is a meaningful one for Rachel, one that carries across multiple blog posts and later, multi-draft writing in other units. The organization of the genres in Rachel's genre set allow her the space to manipulate text anew as she moves from one draft to another, which is a great deal more space than both Marianne and Holly show.

In Rachel, then, we can see a student using the genre sets available to her position as a student to construct a "Writing to Perform" text according to the stated expectations of Emily, her teacher. Rachel's uptake of the genre set is different from Marianne's, as Marianne's changes to her text were more anchored to the structures provided by Emily and the facts that she was attempting to cover in her writing. Rachel, on the other hand, not only had fewer facts to work with, but also had more internalized understandings of crafting a message to help her shape her final product. What Holly, Marianne, and Rachel can all claim, however, is that the work that they put into their product has led them to construct a final product that counted as "Writing to Perform" for classroom purposes. Furthermore, each of them took advantage of the drafting process to orchestrate their activities in new and different ways using the genre sets, community values, and feedback available to them.

This analysis of the blog writing unit indicated the interactions among exposures during literate acts, and how those interactions can lead to shifts in the orchestrations of activity that students engage in on a regular basis. Furthermore, the blog writing unit also shows, clearly, how shifts in the orchestration of literate activity can endure. Because of the duration of the blog writing unit, as well as the way in which the blog writing unit incorporates many different kinds of writing as it runs its course, which in turn provides

many different kinds of material connections among both the literate acts that were constructed for the blog writing unit and the literate acts that were completed with other goals in mind. In short, since the blog writing unit is an extended, multimodal activity, researchers can more effectively indicate enduring shifts in the literate activity of students, because both the extensiveness of the activity and the multimodal nature of that activity creates many easily identifiable connections across multiple chains of literate acts throughout the course of the school year.

**Table 5.7: Key "Writing to Perform" Takeaways**

Key Takeaways from These Literate Acts
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Understandings about writing situations follow material connections or exposure orchestrations.</li> <li>2. Changes in writing activity are not immediately apparent on the page, necessarily.</li> <li>3. Alignments of talk, tools, and texts for the purposes of writing can lead to new understandings about writing, the writing process, and what writing can do.</li> <li>4. People in the same circumstances can construct vastly different texts as they come to understand and define their situations differently.</li> </ol>

**Writing to participate.** Although all writing in class can be seen as some form of participation, writing that Emily prioritizes as a participatory measure has its own qualities, focus, and intentions. When students “Write to Participate,” they use the act of writing as a participatory move. This is significantly different from “Writing to Prepare” or “Writing to Perform.” When students “Write to Prepare,” they are organizing themselves for future activity in some way, and the writing that they complete in that process serves as a tool that they can use as leverage to be successful in future circumstances. When students “Write to Perform,” the writing that they complete is itself a graded activity, such as when students complete a test, a quiz, or a written essay that will be graded. When students “Write to Participate,” however, the writing that they engage in serves as participation, even though it may not be the only form of participation. In the example below, Holly and her fellow



students use the writing that they completed earlier on in class (i.e., “Writing to Prepare”) to create a discussion of a text that is then recorded to serve as a notice of their earlier participation.

*Holly follows intertextual links to think and write differently.* The discussions that Emily’s students have with, around, and about writing serve as the groundwork for richer, fuller understandings of writing to develop. This comes across most clearly during a small group discussion of hero’s journey novels that Emily organized for her class. Each student selected one novel out of several and, through organizational activities involving the entire class, mapped out a reading plan to bring everyone to a complete reading by the end of the time that Emily allotted to them. Throughout this month-long period, Emily’s students met once weekly to have in-depth discussions of the reading they had completed based on the depth and complexity questions Emily gave them to work from. These discussions served as springboards for the students into writing reflections about the books (again, based on the depth and complexity questions) that they then turned in.

**Table 5.8: Discussion Group Excerpt (Holly, Alice, Three Other Students)**

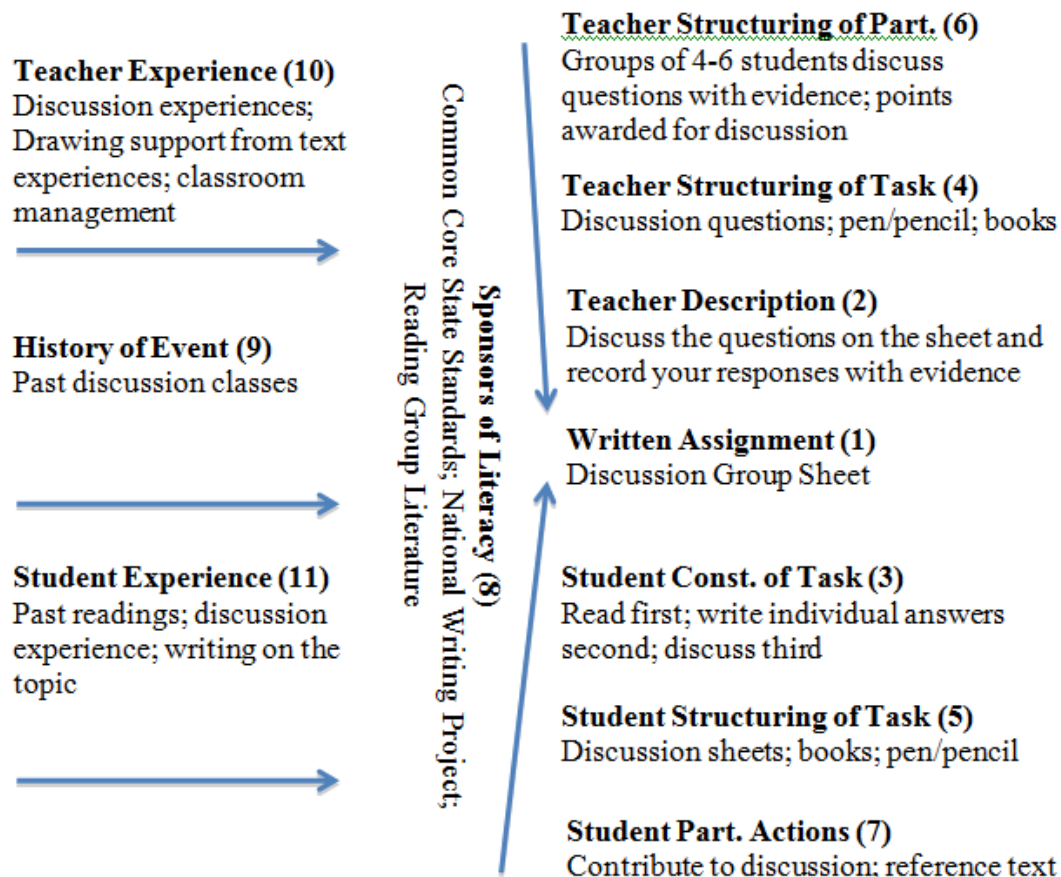
Speaker	Speech
Student	Okay I think ... <b>because in the text it states</b> that he wasn’t being careful because he was so angry so that with the men for like helping the dwarves so he wasn’t being careful and he was protecting himself where he didn’t have any um jewels or a suit of like armor so they caught him in a kind of weakness.
Holly	I...somewhat disagree... <b>the text states that</b> he was unaware of the shortage of jewels in the chest and I think that’s why he probably thought he was protected ... that’s why I think it came as a surprise ...plus they had ...

This discussion indicates two important developing elements in Emily’s classroom: first, Emily’s push to have students reference the text in order to support their interpretations of what was happening in class was beginning to pay off, as students were incorporating it

into their conversations, and using evidence from the text to support the positions they were taking. This differs markedly from discussions earlier in the year that relied more heavily on feeling or personal experience. Second, Holly and her other group member are establishing a formula for *talking into being* a reference to the text. The sentence frame of “In the text, it says...” is repeated by both Holly and her fellow student, and is not only a way of defending their points in their group but is also a way of defending their points for more distant, future audiences when it is written on paper.

In the discussion excerpt shown above, then, Holly and her fellow students appear to be engaging in discussions about interpretations of texts in ways that can be translated into other discussions (i.e., with other people and larger groups) and into other modes (note writing, blog writing, essay writing, etc.). The discussion element of Emily’s class serves as a way for students to begin framing their thoughts in ways that will have multimodal possibilities. But, more than that, students also get to engage in the process of re-presenting their work in multiple ways: through discussion, in notes taken during the discussion, and in write-ups based on that discussion. Essentially, the discussions enable students to engage with a variety of audiences through multimodal drafts, and each of those drafts serves as a different writing purpose, creating a product that students will, in the future, be able to use for a variety of ends.

**Figure 5.25: Holly's Literate Act in Group Discussion**



In this literate act by Holly, we see her structuring, with her classmates, the material in the text and, while building to an answer on the “Discussion Group Sheet,” they reference the text directly. This picks up a community value (i.e., support from the text) and carries it from earlier discussions into the current discussion activity. The act of referring to the text, in addition to the actual phrasing of it (i.e., “The text states...”) will be carried by Holly and many of her fellow students into the writing that they do in the future. This literate act, in fact, is a turning point for Holly and some of her fellow students. Earlier, the students had been writing with textual evidence through sentence frames and discussion starters. However, with this discussion, Holly begins invoking the text on her own, using it to support her argument and better shape the position she is trying to take. After this literate act, Holly

can be seen including the “The text states...” and other similar frames. Following the twin material connection paths of community values and intertextuality, Holly is able to work her way from discussion groups into changed approaches to and forms of written texts.

As the discussion activity examples above indicate, these students developed, over the course of the year, a pattern of multiple passes at communicative opportunities as well as alignments among multimodal approaches to participating in classroom activity. Through discussions and other, similar activities throughout the year, Emily and her students were able to develop an understanding of what “counts” as writing activity in a range of circumstances. Furthermore, each of these “circumstances” built upon the possibilities constructed by prior circumstances. The decisions of what counts as writing also opened the door to specific, mutually-aligned intertextual cues that students could draw from for further writing activity success in the future. While these intertextual connections were multiple, frequent, and always contained a high possibility of revision, a strong, small, and consistent pattern of intertextual references could be traced across the discussion activity (as well as many other kinds of activities) in order to make clear how multimodal interactions impacted the writing development of students in Emily’s class. Emily’s blog writing unit, described and analyzed below, makes clear how these different intertextual connections can serve as a resource for students as they encounter new kinds of writing, new modes of writing, and new audiences for writing as the year progresses. In the next subsection, Holly takes another step forward in her writing development: this time, through sentence combining exercises.

***Holly’s Do Now of November 13.*** On November 13, Emily began the “Do Now” a little later in the class period, and the review of the “Do Now” did not begin until almost 11:30, more than twenty minutes after class began. However, the structure of the activity

remained the same. Emily provided the class with a longer than usual explanation of classroom tasks, which was particularly important since they were working from an activity they had begun the day before. After the explanation, students were given time to complete their “Do Now” activities (i.e., the first literate act). There was a lull for some students before the timer went off, and then Emily asked students to read their texts aloud (i.e., the second literate act).

This “Do Now” represented a shift in focus from earlier “Do Now” assignments from sentence imitations to a more nuanced use of prepositional phrases. Emily introduced prepositional phrases during the previous “Do Now,” and was building on that knowledge with today’s activity. This analysis focuses on the second literate act that students can perform: the response to Emily’s questions about the “Do Now.”

The “Do Now” happened in three separate stages, although each of these stages would be considered the “Do Now” from an participant perspective. Students were given instructions both verbally and on the board. Both of these instructions called attention to the “Do Now” work completed in the previous class. This began the first stage of the “Do Now,” when students read and listened to instructions and filled in the required block of their “Do Now” assignments. These students finished at different times, and after a few minutes, the students began to talk to one another, which began the second stage of the “Do Now.” Emily reminded students to complete “Do Now” number two if they had not already, and then began reviewing the answers, which served as stage three of the “Do Now.” A transcript of the “Do Now” interaction is shown in Table 3.

**Table 5.9: Holly's Do Now**

<b>Initiation</b>	<b>Response</b>	<b>Evaluation</b>
T: Okay do number two if you haven't. And I am		

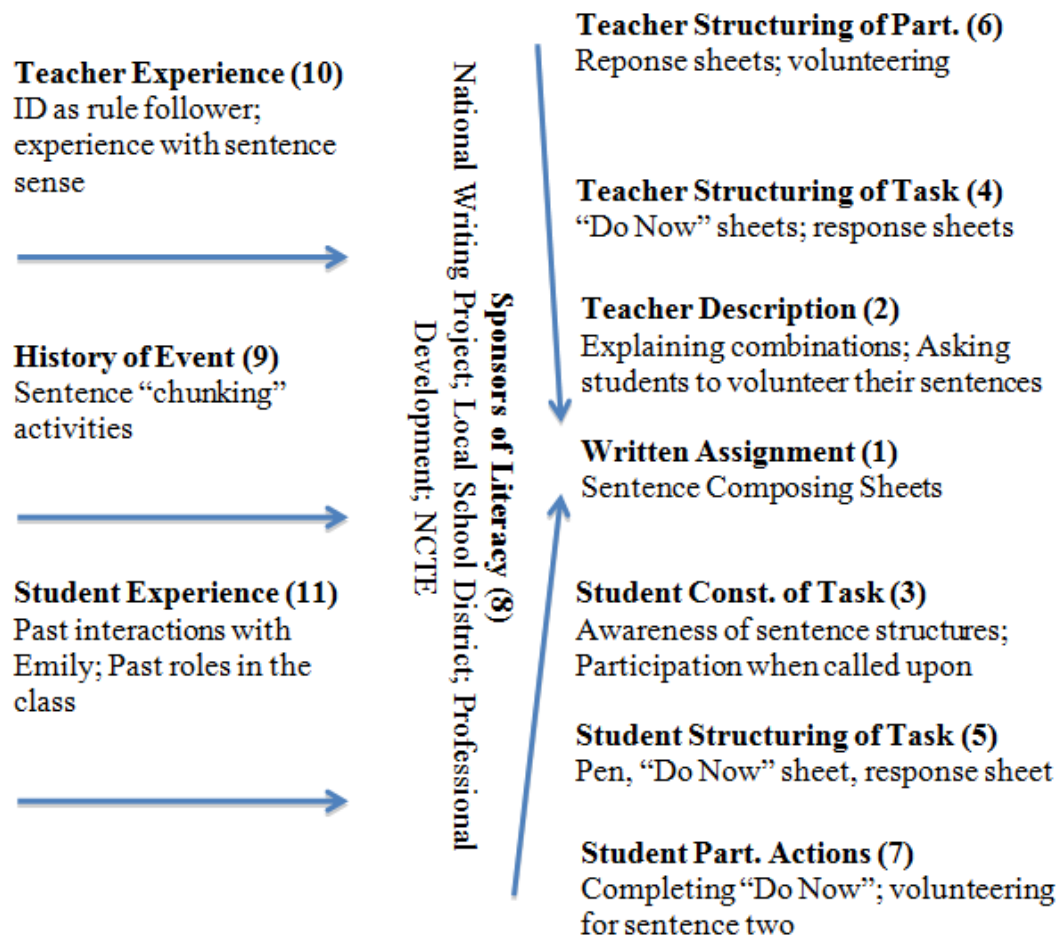
<p>collecting this “Do Now” today because I think you’re done with it.</p> <p>(Continued student work)</p> <p>T: Okay so um I’m going to have (student) start and then if you had it a different way I want you to raise your hand.</p> <p>T: Wait, (student), until it’s quiet</p> <p>T: Okay (student) did an opener one so he’ll read and then if somebody did it a different way or knows a different way you can read yours.</p> <p>T: All right who can do it a different way? How about Holly? Wait, wait until it’s quiet.</p> <p>T: And which, which method was that?</p> <p>T: Did anybody know another way? So we heard</p>	<p>S: (starts to speak)</p> <p>S: Inside Mrs. O’Brien’s kitchen pies were baking in the oven</p> <p>S: Isn’t Mrs. O’Brien a (???)</p> <p>H: Pies inside Mrs. O’Brien’s kitchen were baking in the oven.</p> <p>H: I think that was S-V split</p>	<p>T: Yep so the inside Mrs. O’Brien is opening it, now—</p> <p>T: I don’t know, it’s unclear and I’ve never read that book so I don’t know.</p> <p>T: Okay</p> <p>T: It is.</p>
--	--	--

<p>S-V split, we heard opener, and could we do it one more way? How about (student)?</p>	<p>S: I don't know if this is right I didn't write it that way but I am just guessing. Pies were baking in the oven inside Mrs. O'Brien's kitchen.</p>	<p>T: Yeah that's the closer one so that one works all three ways.</p>
<p>T: Now if you couldn't get it I want you to copy mine because this was the first time and we'll continue with this during the week. Now on your "Do Now" it should be done on both sides if you've been here.</p>		

In this series of I-R-E exchanges, several literate acts are performed by students. The first student reads his response aloud, which is evaluated positively by Emily. After that, Holly volunteers to try a new sentence, one that she has not written down. In this literate act, Holly draws from the resources around her to construct a response that, once more, reproduces an I-R-E exchange between her and Emily.

Note, in the expanded literate act below, the tight overlap between Holly's exposures and Emily's exposures. These actors work well together, which perhaps is how Holly is able to pull her "Writing to Participate" moment here through the community value of sentence sense into other writing activities in the future. Regardless of the reason why, however, Holly can be seen here clearly engaging in a kind of participation and working with sentences in ways that she has not before.

**Figure 5.26: Holly's "Do Now" Literate Act**



Holly’s literate act in this scene is connected to multiple texts, multiple locations, and multiple actors in the classroom. In breaking down this literate act exposure by exposure, three key items were discovered. First, this literate act was geared around “writing to participate.” Although Holly did not actually write during this particular literate act, she was still engaged in working with sentence structures in a manner similar to her sentence writing from her first literate act during the “Do Now” activity. When reviewing the “Do Now” with the students, Emily created an avenue of interaction that Holly could take up when she announced “then if somebody did it a different way or knows a different way you can read yours.” Holly took advantage of this avenue and ventured a suggestion with a sentence that contained a subject-verb split. Through established I-R-E exchanges, Holly was able to act



in the classroom in a way that counted as class participation while also indicating a growing understanding of sentence structures.

This act shows Holly beginning to grasp the community value of sentence structures: she has a tentative understanding that varied sentence structures are important and contribute to what counts as “good writing” in this classroom. Emily had noted in an interview earlier in the year that she wanted her students to establish some “sentence sense,” and that she used the “Do Now” toward those ends. Furthermore, she noted to her students on several occasions that sentence variety was an important element in writing well. During an interview taken shortly after the November 13 “Do Now,” Holly noted that she liked changing her sentence structures, and frequently used revision opportunities to add sentence variety in order to “surprise” Emily. This literate act, then, serves as a powerful starting point for Holly in moving forward with her understanding of the community value of sentence variety. Holly engages in sentence variety here. She then understands the established value of that sentence variety and uses the other structures of writing provided to her (i.e., writing multiple drafts, publishing in multiple formats) to enact that community value.

The material connection of community values, of course, is not the only kind of material connection that leads from the “Do Now” assignments to other literate acts. In fact, Holly would later take a “Do Now” quiz with the rest of her class. The quiz was part of Holly’s genre set as a student in class, which linked up with Emily’s genre set of grading quizzes (as well as writing them) and thus completed one aspect of the complex genre system in this classroom. Furthermore, the sheets that Holly completed her “Do Now” assignments on were collected by Emily for points, and thus contributed to the activity system of this

classroom in a small way. Additionally, the intertextual connections when discussing sentence structures (i.e., subject-verb split, opener, closer, etc.) echo throughout the school year. All of these elements are important, of course, but it is the internalization of the community value of sentence variety that contributes most powerfully to Holly's future writing events, as can be seen from her take up of multiple draft opportunities with sentence variety in mind during the blog writing unit.

In both of the examples provided above, Holly can be seen writing to participate. When Holly engages with her peers and draws on the text to support herself, as in the "...in the text, it states that..." structure, she is participating in the classroom culture in two ways that count: first, in her written recordings of the group's discussion, and, second, in her verbal participation in the discussion using structures that count as appropriate structures for Emily, who is wandering the classroom and scoring participation. When Holly engages in her "Do Now" writing, she is writing to participate in the space that Emily provides her students after their writing is completed. Even though she is not able to use her own writing directly for that participation, her writing activity still set her up for the improvisation that followed. In each of these moments, then, we see Holly using material connections (community values or intertextual references) to bring understanding forward to a new writing situation in ways that will help her understand the new situation that she is constructing with her teacher and classmates.

**Table 5.10: Key "Writing to Prepare" Takeaways**

<b>Key Takeaways from These Literate Acts</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students draw from tools in their proximity both understand and participate in the act of writing.</li> <li>2. Opportunities for students to take up talk, tools, and texts in specific ways can promote the continued take-up of new writing activity.</li> <li>3. Students draw on the structure of their school day to make sense of the activities they are engaged in and as a guide to direct their writing activity.</li> </ol>

4. Intertextual links can both bring a student more deeply into the course community and then, with other material connections, carry those deepened social ties into more complex writing activity.

**Writing to expand.** This purpose was by far the least-used purposes for writing in Emily's classroom, partly because the decision for using it was usually out of her hands. Students "Wrote to Expand" considerably on three occasions: during the introduction to "Restorative Justice;" during Career Day, and during submissions to the school paper, *The Navigator*. Each of these situations did not involve a great deal of sustained, in-class writing that events falling under other writing purposes showed, but there were still opportunities provided to students to help them think about and go about writing differently. Of particular instance for this kind of writing regards the submissions to the *Navigator*.

Like all writing activities, submissions to *The Navigator* did not fall under the "Writing to Expand" category alone. When students "Wrote to Expand" for *The Navigator*, they also "Wrote to Perform" and "Wrote to Prepare" at the same time. The primary drive as indicated by Emily, however, was "Writing to Expand," or crafting a piece of writing that could be submitted to the school's paper. Emily did this twice during the school year. The last submission Emily asked of students was voluntary, which narrowed the impact of other writing purposes, but maintained them nevertheless. The most striking examples of "Writing to Expand," however, came during the first round of *Navigator* submissions.

Zack established early in the year that his identity was mixed up with the idea of being a writer. Zack wrote what he referred to as "character sketches" on his own, and continued to do this through his "Writer's Notebook" entries on occasion—although Emily's setup of the notebooks did not allow him to do this for all of his entries. Zack also considered himself an outsider in the class—not quite a troublemaker, but definitely someone

who regularly operated at the edge of what was acceptable class behavior on occasion—and had trouble mixing this with his identity as a writer. As a writer, he enjoyed the act of writing, but the assignments that Emily provided him did not always spark his interest. An outlet occurred, however, through *Navigator* writing submissions that Emily required of students at the start of the school year.

The *Navigator*, the student-run newspaper of Goodland Middle School, was run by another GMS language arts teacher, and Emily tried to assist with the first issue of every year by having students in her honors class write submissions for the *Navigator* as a grade. Whether the submissions were accepted or not did not impact the grade—the *Navigator* only had so much available space, so even good articles were sometimes not printed—but the activity gave students the opportunity to experience writing for a newspaper, which some of them would hopefully find enjoyable and wish to continue doing.

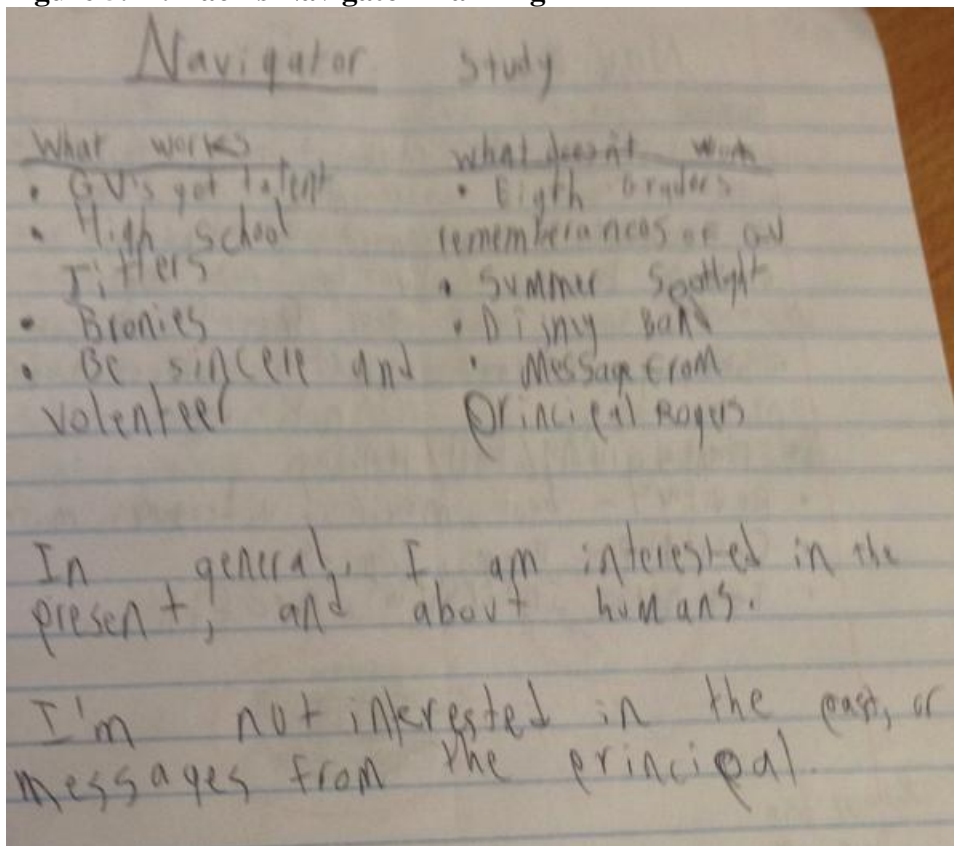
The discussion about the *Navigator* spanned several classes. Emily introduced the newspaper assignment during the first three weeks of school. On October 4, she explained in some more detail (i.e., what the specifics of submissions were for the paper) the assignment. On October 8, Emily had students write down, in their “Writer’s Notebooks,” a list of possible topics. This progressed across several activities until students had decided what they would be writing about and, on October 10, prewrote about their topics. On October 14, Emily had students write some sample headlines for the articles they were considering writing. Two days later, on October 16, students had the opportunity to work with their peers on revising one another’s work for submission. In later months, as new issues of the *Navigator* rolled out, Emily gave submissions as a possible alternative to “Writer’s Notebook” entries.

***Zack finds a way to engage with school-based writing.*** Zack was one of the students who found working for a newspaper enjoyable. Emily gave students several options for submitting to the newspaper (opinion, advertisement, poetry), and Zack ended up successfully trying his hand at photography, although he ran through several other ideas first. The images that he submitted to the *Navigator* impressed the teacher-advisor in charge of the paper, and Zack was soon hired as lead photographer. This role served him in several ways: it allowed him to contribute to the writing culture at the school, gave him a creative outlet, and allowed him to fashion a relationship with his teachers that was slightly different from his peers. Because of his role, Zack occasionally had to leave the classroom to take pictures (or take students out of the class so that they could have those pictures taken) and this activity, as well as his publishing experiences, allowed him to go about writing activity differently when his role as student and his role as lead photographer collided. Much as he did during the “Writing to Organize” activity, Zack used his photography role in the *Navigator* to help establish his own sense of self and identity within the classroom culture.

The process that ended with him working as a member of the *Navigator* began with everyday school activity. During the October 10 lesson, Emily asked her students to read through samples of the *Navigator* and decide what “works” and what “doesn’t work” as topics for them. Zack’s notes can be seen in the figure below.

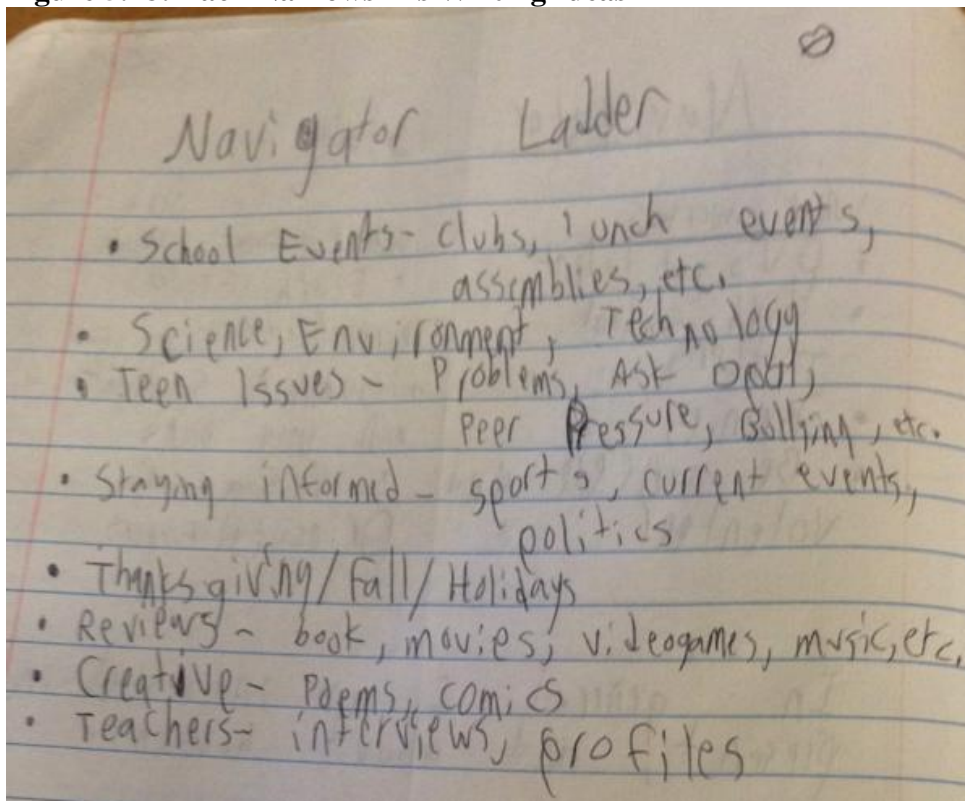
During his writing and interaction with peers throughout the October 10 lesson, Zack pulls together several resources to focus his writing for the *Navigator*. By separating topics he is fond of from topics he is not fond of, he is able to isolate ideas that work for him as a topic, and bring him to a list of ideas that both align with his interests and count as participation during this particular activity.

**Figure 5.27: Zack's Navigator Planning**



Notice that, in the figure below, Zack's choices all match with his "in general" statement in the figure above. Furthermore, at the top right-hand side of the page, a symbol can be seen that connects to Emily's "depth and complexity" questions (in particular, the "language of the discipline" questions). Emily has structured her writing so that students can use the class language as a frame upon which they can expand into other situations—in this case, the newspaper. Zack has taken that opportunity to identify topics that he is interested in writing about, which both match his self-identity as a writer and allow him to push forward with writing on his own terms. His subsequent decision about what to write—a review of a video game—is tightly connected with his out of school writings and other activities.

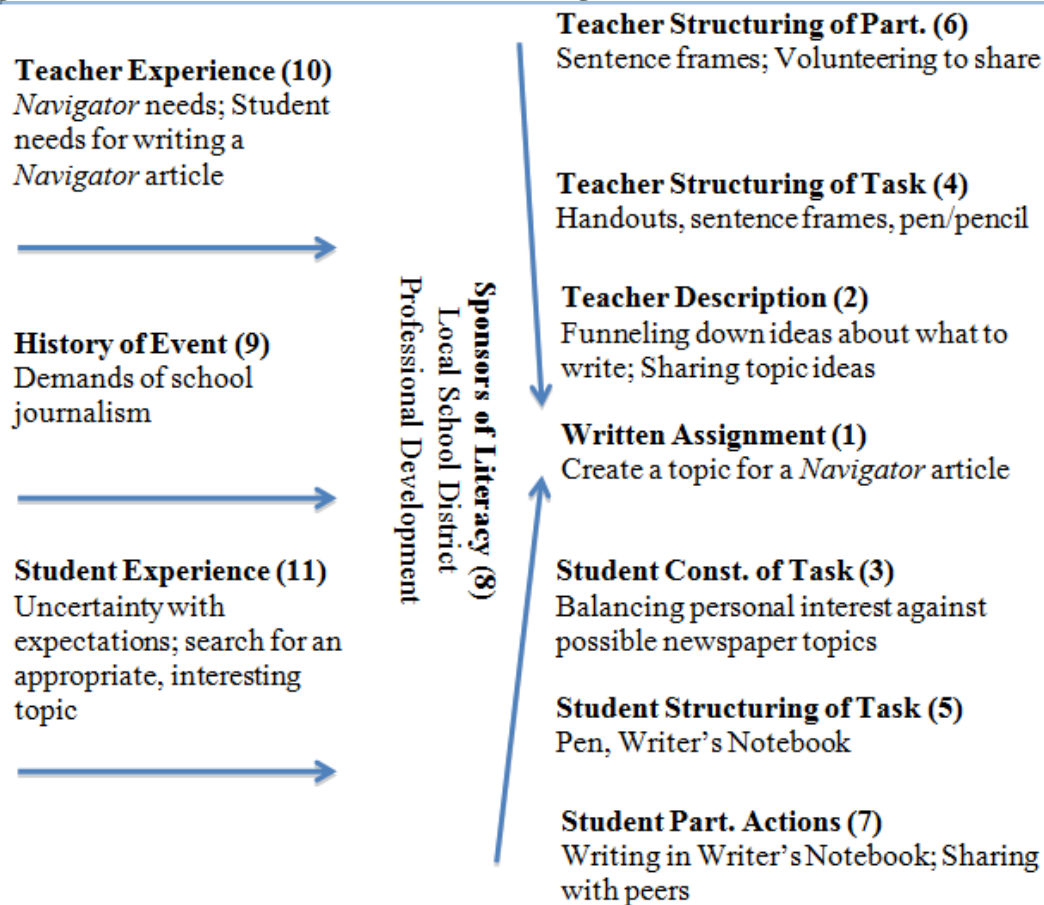
**Figure 5.28: Zack Narrows His Writing Ideas**



The literate act breakdown of Zack's writing decisions for the *Navigator* entry show us that has begun to see the *Navigator* as a place where he can write outside of the classroom, yet still in ways that are sanctioned (or at least respected) by the classroom. The images above show Zack moving back and forth between his understandings of the expectations of the assignment and his desire to find something he is interested in writing about.

In the literate act identified below, Zack's actions to balance his own interests with the needs of the newspaper come to light via Exposure 3. Through the talk, tools, and texts in this exposure, Zack finds a way to identify writing that is personally meaningful to him and yet, at the same time, also meaningful to the paper.

**Figure 5.29: Zack's Literate Act for the Navigator**



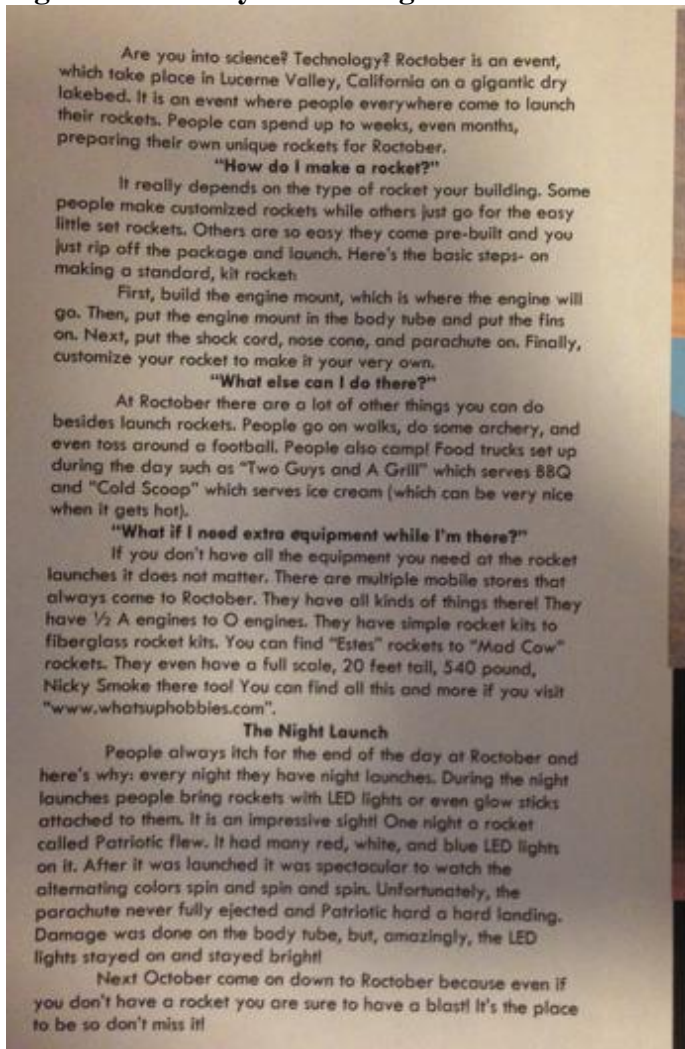
This balancing work on Zack's part bears itself out in several ways, primarily through Exposures 3 and 7 in the future writing activity of Zack. Through the literate act of planning for a newspaper article, Zack identifies a topic that he is interested in writing about. This successful push to match his own interests and the demands of his writing situation carries forward as Zack moves into other writing activities in Emily's class. Furthermore, Zack's role with the newspaper—he earns a place as the staff photographer—provides him with opportunities to further engage with multimodal writing in ways that both interest him and eschew the specific tensions of writing in classroom situations that brings about his attempts to subvert the classroom structure when possible.



Through the literate acts that Emily partially constructs for him, Zack creates opportunities for writing activity that align with his own intentions and interests. He then uses that interest in those literate act moments to build a connection to the *Navigator*, which allows him a functional role that “counts” in both the classroom and the school at large to work on his self-identity as a writer, his desire to meet the demands of classroom and school activity, and his interest in furthering his own individualistic approach to that classroom and school activity.

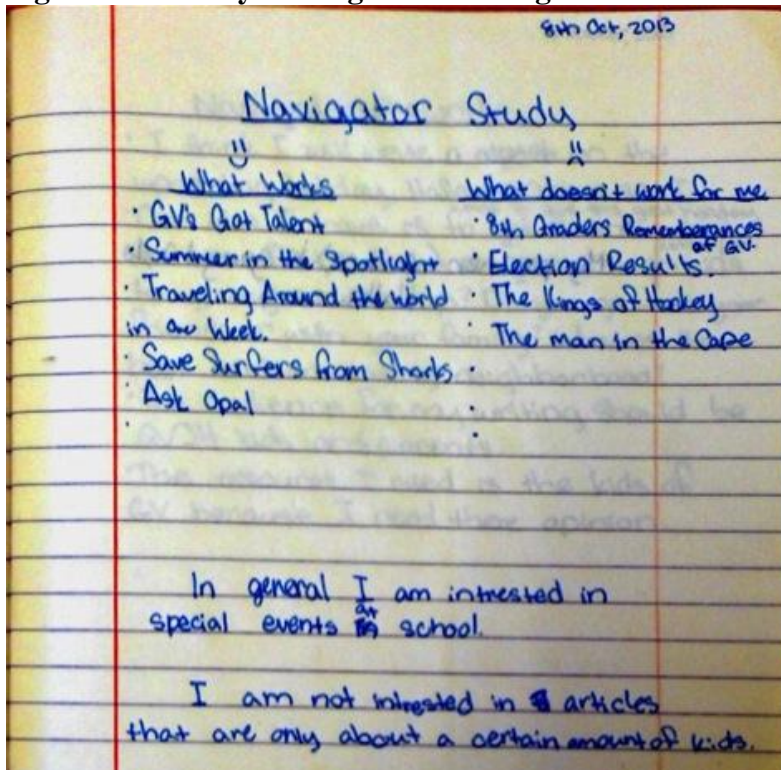
***Holly writes herself further into classroom activity.*** Compare Zack’s writing experiences with Holly’s writing experiences for the *Navigator*. For her assignment, Holly chose to write about an event that she and her father participate in every year—Roctober, a rocket launching festival that occurs every October. Holly took significant time to write the article, shown below, although, in the end, it was not accepted for publication in the *Navigator*. However, her process of writing it did lead her to receive a good grade across several assignments, which convinced Emily that she was a talented writer, which shifted the relationship that Emily and Holly had during the school year.

Figure 5.30: Holly's "Rocking at Roctober"



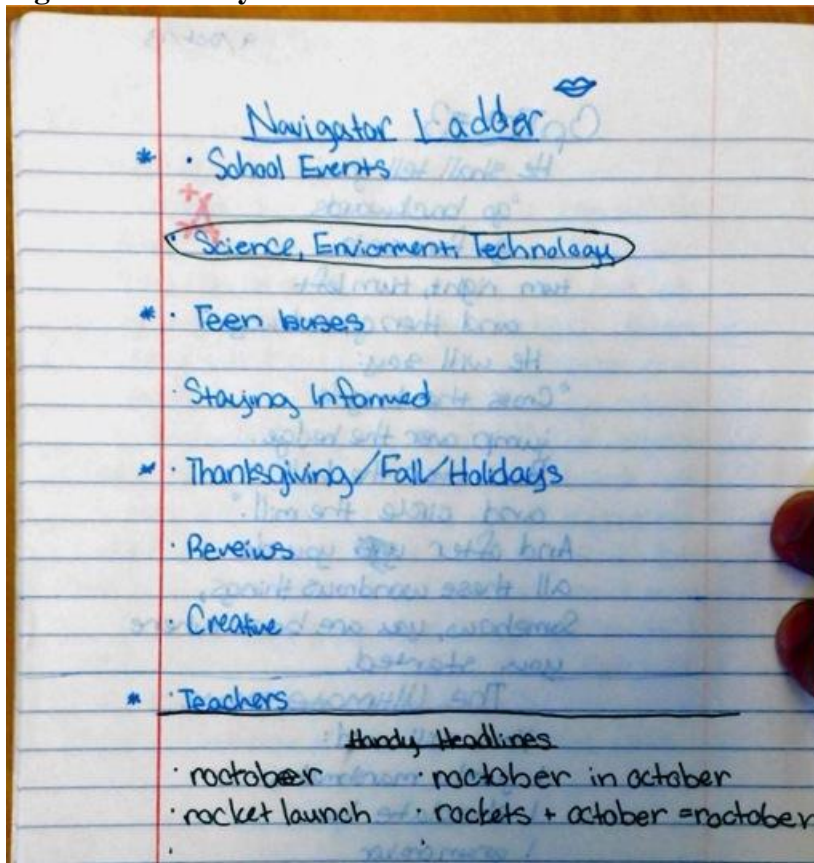
Holly's final "Roctober" article emerged from a focus on something entirely different. As the figure below indicates, Holly initially showed an interest in writing about school events.

**Figure 5.31: Holly's Navigator Planning**



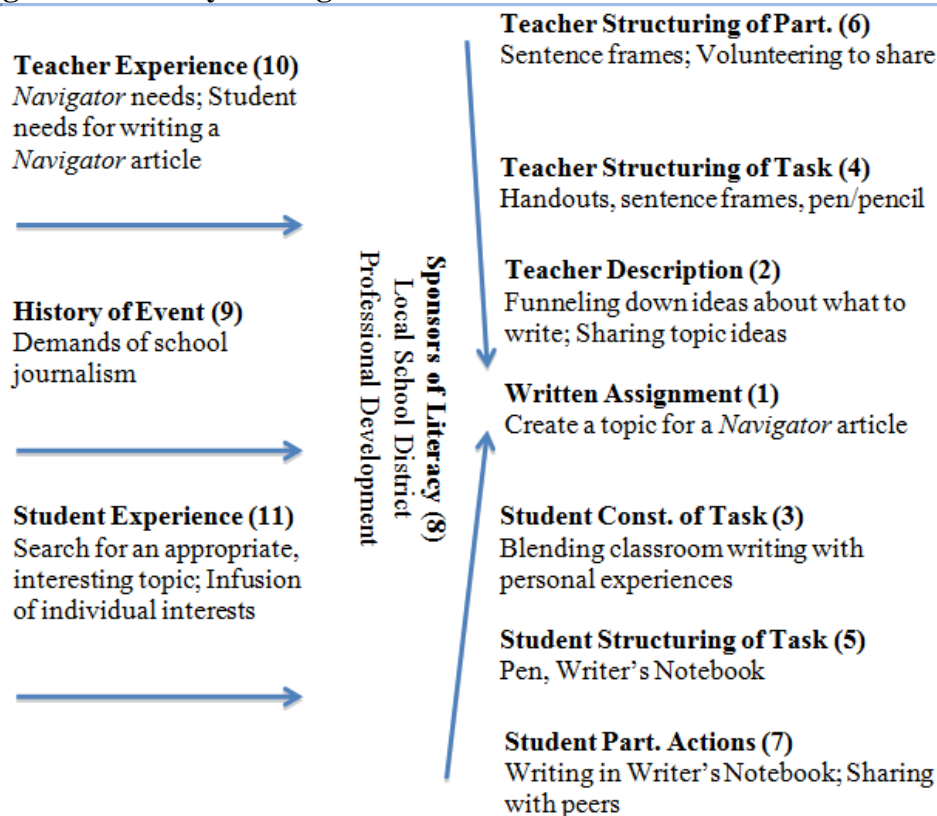
This writing topic carries forward into other prewriting activities for Holly, but, as can be seen by the altered text (written in a different color) in the figure below, Holly eventually changes her mind on the topic. This change of spirit brings together two different aspects of her writing experience in Emily's class: her personal experiences and the writing that she completed during previous literate acts. The idea of writing about "Roctober" connects with her earlier writing in Emily's class. Holly has written frequently about experiences in her personal life—such as archery and horseback riding—and will continue to do so throughout the rest of the school year. While the topic of a newspaper article may have initially brought several other ideas to mind, Holly eventually goes back to what she has done before. She draws from personal experience and attempts to put it in a new framework, and she uses her past writing about the *Navigator* submission to help her do that.

**Figure 5.32: Holly Revises Earlier Ideas**



This moment of reorganizing—of using past writing artifacts as tools to orient to new writing activity—shows Holly expanding her understanding of assignments and her willingness to use personal experiences to be successful with those assignments. Holly completes all of the required planning and prewriting for the newspaper article, gets a new idea, changes her goals, and uses her planning and prewriting tools from the previous topic to move her forward. She also, as is indicated at the bottom of the above image, uses Emily's advice about headlines to further integrate the experience that she writes about with the expectations of the *Navigator* genre. Holly, here, is using her new writing experiences to blend the demands of the classroom with her stock of past writing activity and understandings.

**Figure 5.33: Holly's Navigator Literate Act**



The literate act shown above looks, no doubt, a great deal like the literate act that Zack engaged with writing in. The one, important difference is that, instead of blending newspaper writing and personal interests (as Zack did), Holly blends classroom writing with her own, personal experiences. For Holly, the writing that the students did for the *Navigator*, while indeed linked with newspaper writing, was also an opportunity for her to expand writing about her own experiences within the confines of Emily's classroom. That is, even though Emily attempted to structure the writing activity as a "Writing to Expand" purpose, Holly actually took it up as more of a "Writing to Write" purpose, mirroring the kinds of topics she usually wrote about in her "Writer's Notebook" throughout the year.

Holly's writing in this moment, of course, leads her into shaping writing experiences differently in other writing moments. The progression that Holly goes through here in order

to reach her decision to write about her own personal experiences serves as a learning experience for her, something she can take with her into later, more complex writing moments. This take-up can be seen not only in Holly's blog writing, but in all of her extended work throughout the remainder of the year. Much like in this article, Holly is able to make a personal presence felt and draw from past experience in order to construct responses to writing situations created by Emily. Roctober is merely an elaborated response to a more extensive writing process than Holly's earlier work engaged in.

Just as Zack parlayed the writing activity of being a photographer into furthering his own identity and sense of self in the writing classroom (i.e., by blending his own intentions and interests with the demands of the assignment), so Holly has furthered her own sense of studenting with her *Navigator* submission (i.e., drawing from her own experience to meet the needs of specific writing activities). Although she did not have her work accepted for publication, she still received the points she needed on it, and in doing so exhibited the effort that Emily would come to expect from her throughout the school year. These "Writing to Expand" moments, even though they carried beyond the classroom, served, for these two students, to confirm, expand, and secure their understandings of themselves and their respective roles in the social network of the classroom.

Emily's purpose in assigning the *Navigator* articles to students was clearly to get them to expand their writing beyond the classroom walls: this much is clear through the demand that they submit to the *Navigator*. Zack and Holly can be seen developing in their writing activity through the genre systems (Holly) or activity systems (Zack) of which they are part. Holly interacts via text with Emily, and each comes to understand the other and adjust the expectations of the other differently. As a result, Holly continues to put time into

her writing assignments, and Emily expects success from Holly—something that impacts their interactions during I-R-E exchanges in large class discussions. Zack’s activities in Emily’s classrooms branch into the newspaper, and he is able to use the overlapping systems to further his own unique situation in the classroom on occasion. The position also furthers his own understanding of himself as a writer (and a serious writer, at that). Each of these instances accelerates the developing approaches to writing activity that have been emerging from each student as the year has progressed.

**Table 5.11: Key "Writing to Expand" Takeaways**

Key Takeaways from These Literate Acts
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Changed writing activity must follow talk, tools, and texts into other locations in order for the change to be sustained.</li> <li>2. Students draw off of the order of the school day and the structure of classroom activities to build new understandings of writing activity.</li> <li>3. Different students can take up different talk, tools, and texts within the same literate opportunity.</li> <li>4. The ends toward which students use the same talk, tools, and texts can vary widely as well.</li> </ol>

**Writing to reframe.** The act of reframing—which often took the form of reflection in Emily’s classroom—was a regular presence throughout the school year. One of the most common “Writing to Reframe” moments came at the conclusion of a unit during the school year. From the first unit of the school year, Emily asked her students to “Write to Reframe” at the conclusion of every unit. Emily frequently described this as a way to “really learn” something, a way to “get to know” the information in an even more powerful way. This, actually, drew from a unit on brain activity that Emily led her students through near the start of the school year. This unit, described below, can be seen as the starting point of reflection, along with the tools provided by the Local School District sponsor of literacy (such as Cornell Notes), through which students came to understand, define, and act on the concept of “reflection.”

At the end of each of her units, Emily asked her students to complete a short writing activity that asked students to reflect on their learning from the unit. This activity involved re-reading their unit packets, highlighting important points, and using those highlighted points to reflect on their learning. During my review of the reflection unit, I found that not all students drew very heavily from their highlighting and note-taking process. Despite that, however, students still had the chance to think deeply about their learning through writing, and many students did, in fact, use the reflective activity as an avenue for further, more careful thinking.

The reflection unit highlights the genre set and system setup of the classroom. It also indicates the pressures that various sponsors of literacy and systemic constraints have on the literacy learning of students throughout the school year. Through an analysis of several reflective papers from various students across the school year, I identify the ways in which literate acts were powerfully shaped by powerful, distantiated social forces that are present in the situation of the literate act.

Emily uses talk and classroom text to carefully structure writing activity during the reflection. To begin with, reflective activity only takes place after students have organized their binders and prepared their unit packets for a grade. Once students have done that, Emily asks the class to go through their packets and highlight important points from each sheet. The concept of highlighting, as well as the concept of important points, were established earlier in the year, first through “Cornell Notes” (brought to the classroom via the Goodland school district’s sponsorship) and later through subsequent unit reflections. The reflections examined below come from the second half of the school year, when understandings of these terms have been aligned via interaction by the students in the class.



When Emily asks her students to “highlight,” they take away the same understanding from the word that she does.

Through clear intertextual references, community values, and genre sets and systems, Emily’s students are able to identify the kinds of writing they have to do. Additionally, these material connections from one reflective activity to the next constrain student writing activity, limiting the options they perceive themselves as having. But these constraints are talked into being by Emily and her students as they draw from the sponsors of literacy that surround them in the classroom.

Consider the reflective writing opportunity that Emily provided her students with at the end of the “Hero’s Journey” unit, as seen in the figure below. This reflective sheet is similar to other reflective sheets that Emily will hand out later in the year. Emily uses the space of the page and its location in the packet she had assembled for her students to direct student attention toward specific aspects of the unit they had just completed: the language of the discipline and the essential questions of the unit. Both of aspects have their roots in other sponsors of literacy: the “language of the discipline” that Emily lists at the top of the unit is a reference to the “Depth and Complexity” questions posed by USC researcher Sandra Kaplan and picked up by Emily at a professional development workshop, while the “essential questions” of the unit are instructional organization tools offered by many classroom practice scholars (See Wong & Wong, 2001, for an example). Emily structured the activity for this page still further with her specific directions about the reflection and the highlighting activity she had completed earlier. Students had this information in front of them, had the potential to use that information invoked via interaction with the teacher, and were then tasked with

filling out a short response (given the amount of space available on the sheet of paper) to a reflective question.

A close look at this reflective writing activity shows how various sponsors of literacy influence the writing possibilities and constraints of students, but also identifies the many other pressures at work on student writing from more local issues. Emily's structuring of the writing that students were to complete, for example, was also limited by the amount of time in a school day, the demands of other classroom activities, and the classroom management demands of her classroom. The reflective writing that students achieve in each reflective activity is not the result of the mere organization of the activity, but the ways in which that activity fits with all of the other demands and issues in the classroom.

**Figure 5.34: Hero's Journey Reflection Sheet**

The Hero or Heroine's Journey Novel Unit

Language of the Discipline

theme	setting	connotation
	mood	denotation

plot

exposition, rising action, climax, resolution, foreshadowing, internal conflict and external conflict, parallel episodes, subplot

point of view

first-person point of view

third-person limited point of view

omniscient point of view

characterization

**Essential Questions**

**Thematic Question:** Are people ruled by destiny or free will? Are actions dictated by fate or do we have the freedom to make our own choices?

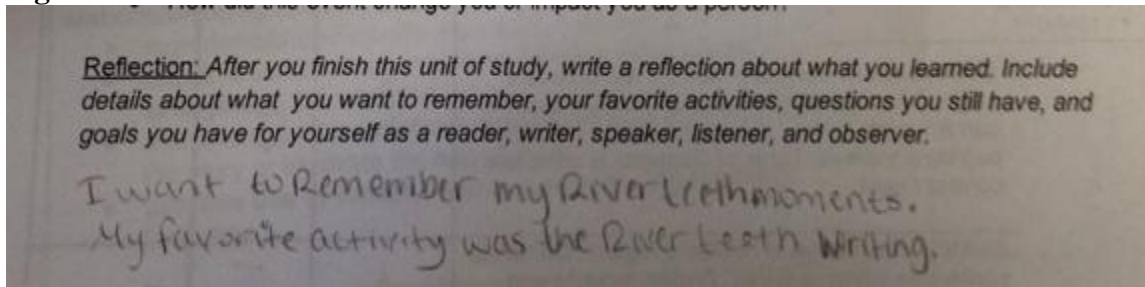
- What is the hero's journey? Why do people continue telling this story over and over again?
- How do authors create characters? How do story elements interact? (i.e., How do plot, setting and characterization influence the theme?) How do authors show different points of view?
- How do the themes connect to other works and to real life?
- How does the writer's style (e.g., word choice, figurative language, dialogue, imagery) affect the story?
- What is the difference between connotative and denotative meanings of words? How does a word's connotation impact what the author is trying to say?

**Reflection:** After you finish this unit of study, write a reflection about what you learned. Include details about what you want to remember, your favorite activities, questions you still have, and goals you have for yourself as a reader, writer, speaker, listener, and observer.

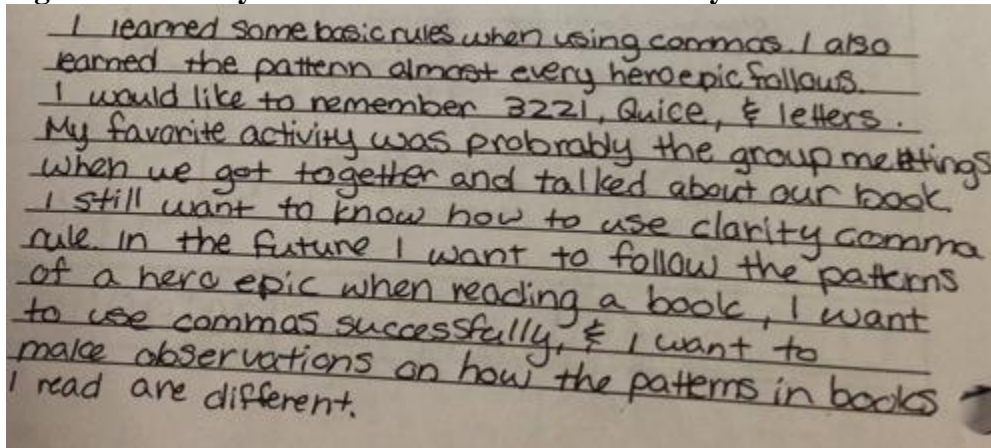
Nor do those “other” demands in the classroom remain static: the kinds of writing that Emily asks her students to do, and can ask her students to do, varies throughout the year. In the case of the reflective writing activity, students were often asked to complete reflective activities of different qualities as the year progressed. The example provided above, from the

Hero's Journey unit, is a more advanced reflective activity. During earlier units, Emily would ask her students to write reflective pieces with less structure, which altered the results of the reflective writing activity. Consider, for example, the reflective writing constructed by two students, Holly and Alice, in response to the "Hero's Journey" unit and the "River Teeth" unit, respectively, presented in the figures below.

**Figure 5.35: Alice's Reflection of the River Teeth Unit**



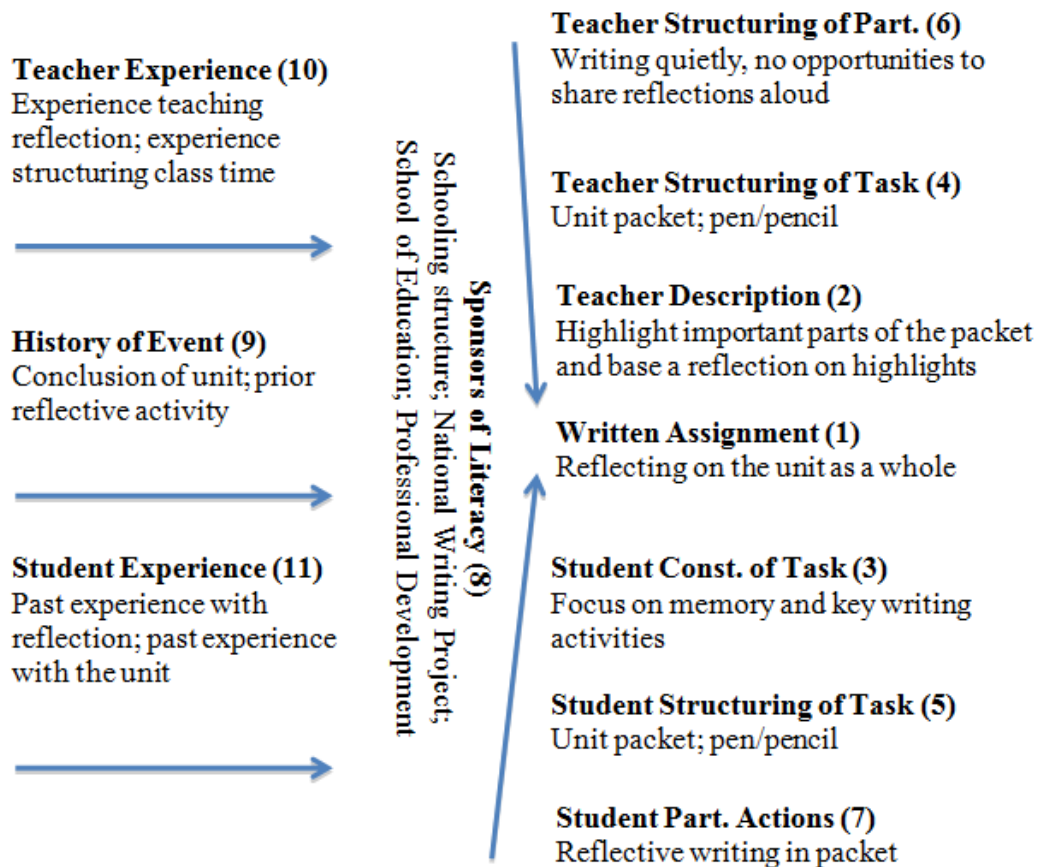
**Figure 5.36: Holly's Reflection of the Hero's Journey Unit**



In these examples, both Holly is able to organize responses to the reflective writing activity by drawing from the extensive question, her notes, and her past experiences with the unit. The reflective activity, then, serves as a way for Holly to bring together her knowledge, artifacts, and experiences in a powerful way. It is clear that both Holly and Alice got something different out of their reflective opportunities: Holly took away a great deal of knowledge about commas, while Alice used the opportunity to reframe the questions as answers. However, both of them were able to produce that information in a coherent, written

form through the assistance of the reflective structuring that Emily provided. She asked her students to “Write to Reframe” their experiences, and they were able to do just that through the structuring of the reflective activity, albeit with different results. Holly’s work, as shown in the figure above, appears to capture the breadth of the material that the students worked with during the unit more completely, as if she is using the writing moment to move forward in her understandings of how each of the elements fit together. Holly reassembles different elements from her writing packet and puts them together to create a widely-focused answer to Emily’s question. Alice, on the other hand, foregoes much of her packet and focuses, instead, on the memories that she put into it.

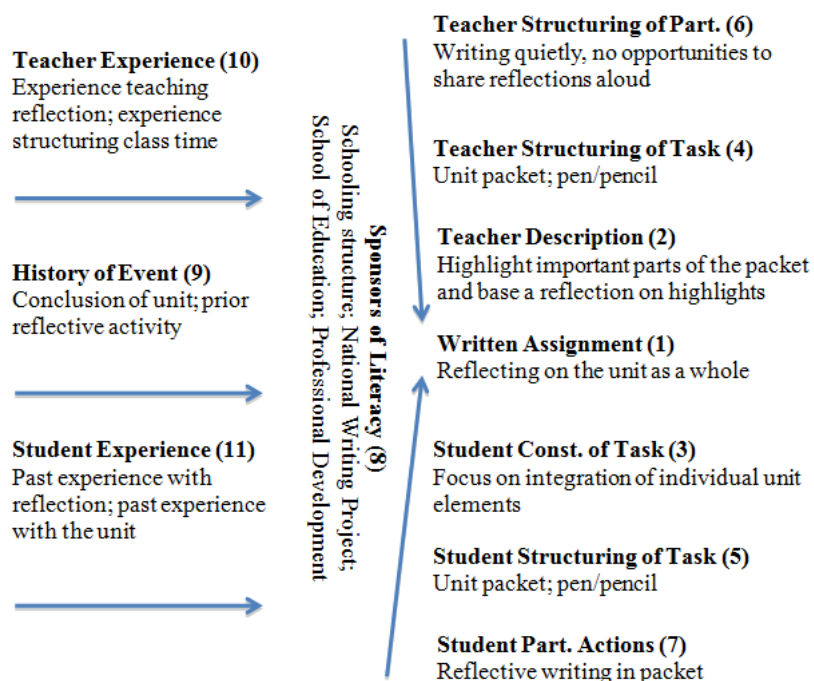
**Figure 5.37: Alice's Reflection Literate Act**



The literate act breakdown above shows the various pressures revealed by each exposure for Alice. In particular, Exposure 3 shows that Alice is focused on “memory and key writing activities:” that is, as she makes sense of this unit and what she can take away from it in the future, she is focused on the concept of river teeth and the specific memories that they bring out for her.

This reflective activity represents, for Alice, a changed perspective on the utility of reflective writing. In this moment, Alice highlights her own experiences, and makes them meaningful through the context of the activities that the students completed in class. Really, she is inscribing her own experiences within the writing demands of the class, and at the same time valuing (for both school purposes and other purposes) her written records of those memories. Alice, then, has used her “Writing to Reframe” opportunity to more deeply connect her personal experiences with the demands of schooling, and has begun to see the two intertwine in more complex ways.

**Figure 5.38: Holly's Reflection Literate Act**



As can be seen in the literate act above, Holly takes a different approach to the reflecting writing than Alice does. Whereas Alice uses the “Writing to Reframe” as an opportunity to link her personal experiences more tightly to her school experiences, Holly remains focused on the wide range of learning that the students performed throughout the unit. Instead of thinking more deeply about a single aspect (i.e., like Alice’s focus on the “River Teeth”), Holly attempts to bring together a wide assortment of concepts and activities from throughout the unit. In this way, she leans more heavily on the various components of the unit packet, something that Alice did not give much time or attention to during her reflection writing. The organization of talk, tools, and texts within this literate act shows Holly linking this wide variety of activity further with her own interests and concerns, which builds from the sentence starters provided by Emily. This remixing of the elements of a unit into a complex whole is something that Holly continues to do throughout future “Writing to Reframe” moments, but it does something more: it shows that Holly is seeing the activities she engages in as linked in some way, even if the details of those connections are subject to change. This understanding of the elements of a unit as tied together in a variety of ways impacts her options for drawing from them in later literate acts, and also seems to build from the “Do Now” – Blog Writing connection she displayed in her earlier analysis.

This tendency of Alice to focus and Holly to encompass is common across both students’ reflective activities throughout the year. What is different for both of these students at these particular moments is that (1) Alice incorporates her own experiences into her reflection and (2) Holly begins moving outward into experiences beyond the classroom.

Before this “Writing to Reframe” activity, Alice had always stayed focused on the elements of the classroom that the unit had focused on. For example, Alice’s response to the

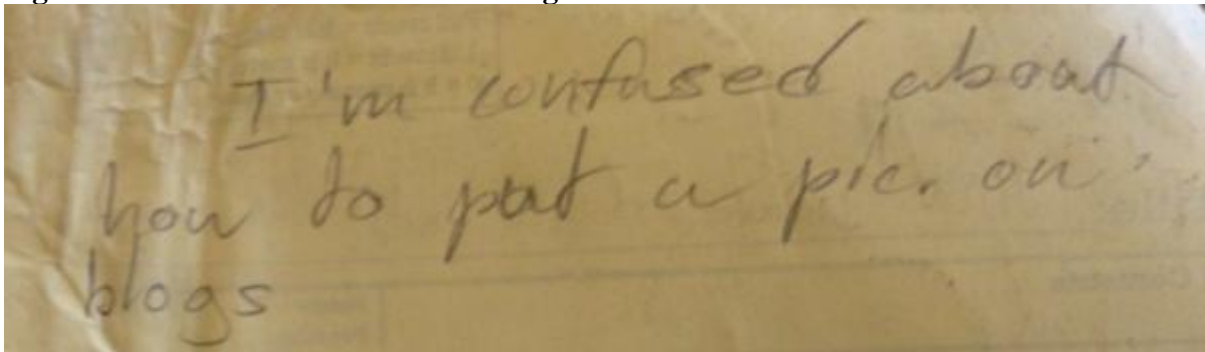
“Upstanders vs. Bystanders” unit was “An important assignment or task in this unit was blogging about an upstander.” This sentence, like many of the other sentences that Alice writes during her reflective activity, is structured by the sample sentence frames that Emily provides to her students. In another reflective writing piece that Alice writes, she says “What I want to remember is the Figurative Language” (*sic*). All of the writing that Alice performs in the reflective writing moments are minimal, framed by the structures that Emily gives students, and not indicative of Alice’s growth in thinking about the topics she is mentioning. The “Writing to Reframe” literate act that Alice engages in during the “River Teeth” unit is also minimal and not indicative of Alice’s growth in thinking about her topics. However, there are two significant changes. First, she uses more than one sentence. Second, both of these sentence reflect different aspects of the same concept: her river teeth moments. She both wants to remember them and enjoyed writing them. Here, we see Alice’s writing not only reflecting what she saw as important to the unit, but as important to her own experiences with the unit. Alice, by the end of the year, has begun pulling down more items in the “Writing to Reframe” activity than she did earlier in the year, and her understandings of the concepts she is writing about have become more complex.

Holly, on the other hand, has always been complex in her representations of learning in the reflective writing activities. During the “Writing to Reframe” with the Upstanders unit, however, Holly begins moving not just beyond individual assignments or units, but the classroom as a whole. Holly takes the opportunity of “Writing to Reframe” that Emily has given her and brings it to a level of concern with her future reading and writing activity. While it remains to be seen whether Holly actually carries through on any of this or not, the potential material connections between the work that she has done in this unit and the work

that she may do in other situations is now present because of the “Writing to Reframe” activity that Emily gave her students.

Other reflective activities that the students produced were not as successful as either Holly or Alice, at least for the purpose that Emily focused on. These assignments, which took place earlier in the year, were structured by Emily through slides on her television screen, and did not provide students with the kind of in-depth information about the unit that the “Hero’s Journey” or “River Teeth” units did, although she does provide them with several sentence starters. While the students were still able to reflect on their experiences, the results were not as in-depth as the “Hero’s Journey” reflection by Holly. Consider the examples of Nick, Alexis, and Clarence below.

**Figure 5.39: Clarence Reflection on Blog Unit**



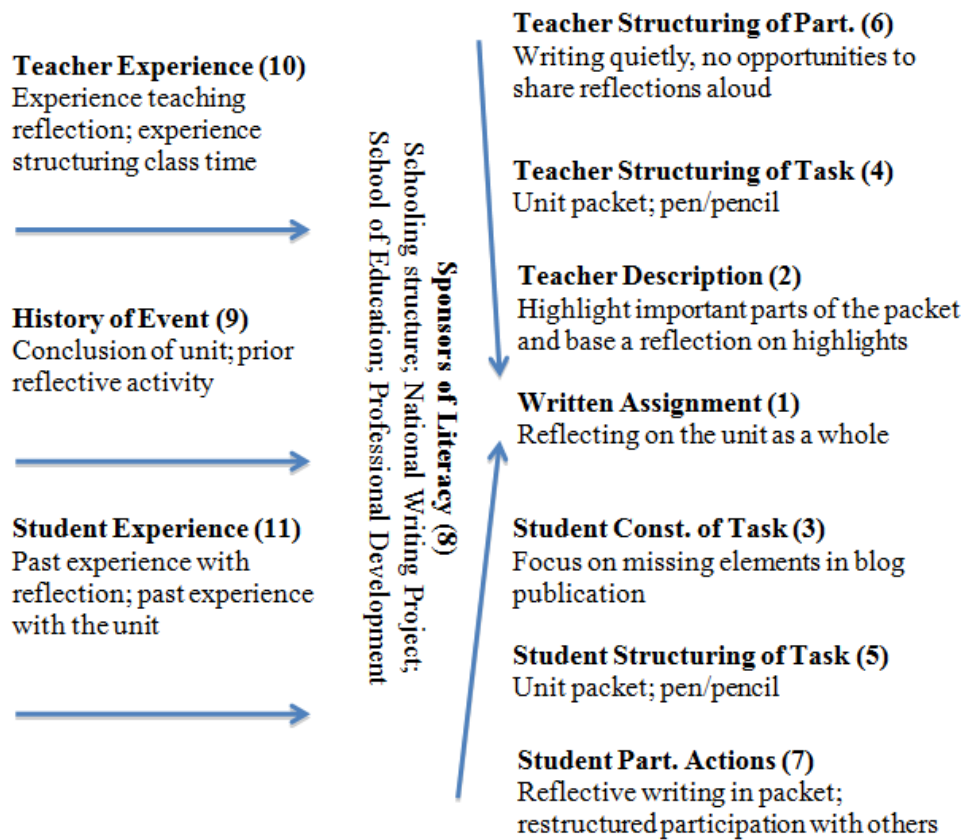
Clarence, in his reflective writing above, advances on two levels with “Writing to Reframe.” First, he completed a reflection, something that he does not always complete in the time given to him. Clarence is easily distracted by his fellow classmates, and that he was able to complete this writing activity is evidence that he has made strides in structuring his activity around the act of writing so that he can complete a writing task, if only temporarily.

The second level of advancement that Clarence evidences is his concern with the look of his blog. That Clarence sees pictures as an option in his blog writing, and that he has a desire to communicate in that way, shows an awareness of what his peers are writing and



what he can possibly write with the tools available to him that he has not displayed before. In fact, Clarence does not, in the end, include pictures in his blog writing—something that may indicate continued struggles with his writing activity around blog writing—but Clarence does make it clear that his awareness of his options (as well as his shortcomings in using those options) during blog writing is raised.

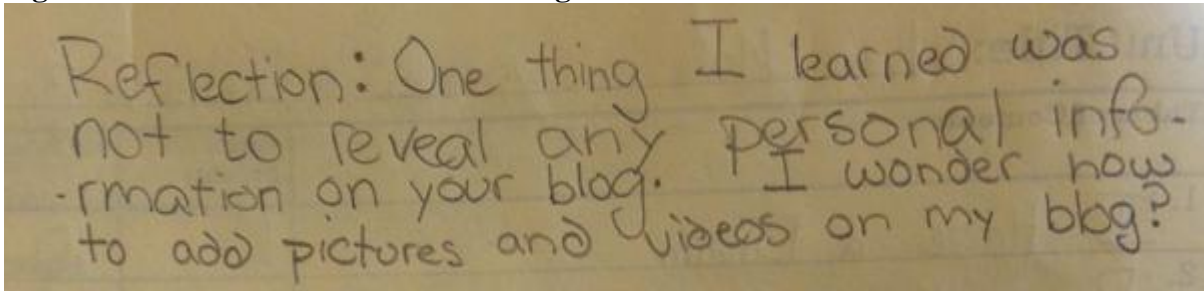
**Figure 5.40: Clarence's Shifted Reflective Activity**



In the literate act shown above, Clarence shifts the structure of his participative actions to engage in reflective writing. When he does so, the focus of his writing hones in on the extra features of blog writing. This alertness to the writing that his peers are accomplishing is something that ebbs and flows in Clarence's attention through the remainder of the writing activities: however, his attention in this literate act (as well as his expression of it) signals the start of a gradually changing awareness of the larger writing

situation of which he is part. This awareness, brought to him via the complex genre and activity systems of the classroom, lead him to identify a specific gap in his understandings of the blog writing activity, and carry forward in further “Writing to Reframe” and other writing purposes in order to allow him to identify further resources around him to go about the writing tasks that are assigned to him. That is, his conversation, which prior to this literate act were often a source of distraction, could now turn—at times—into a resource for understanding writing activity.

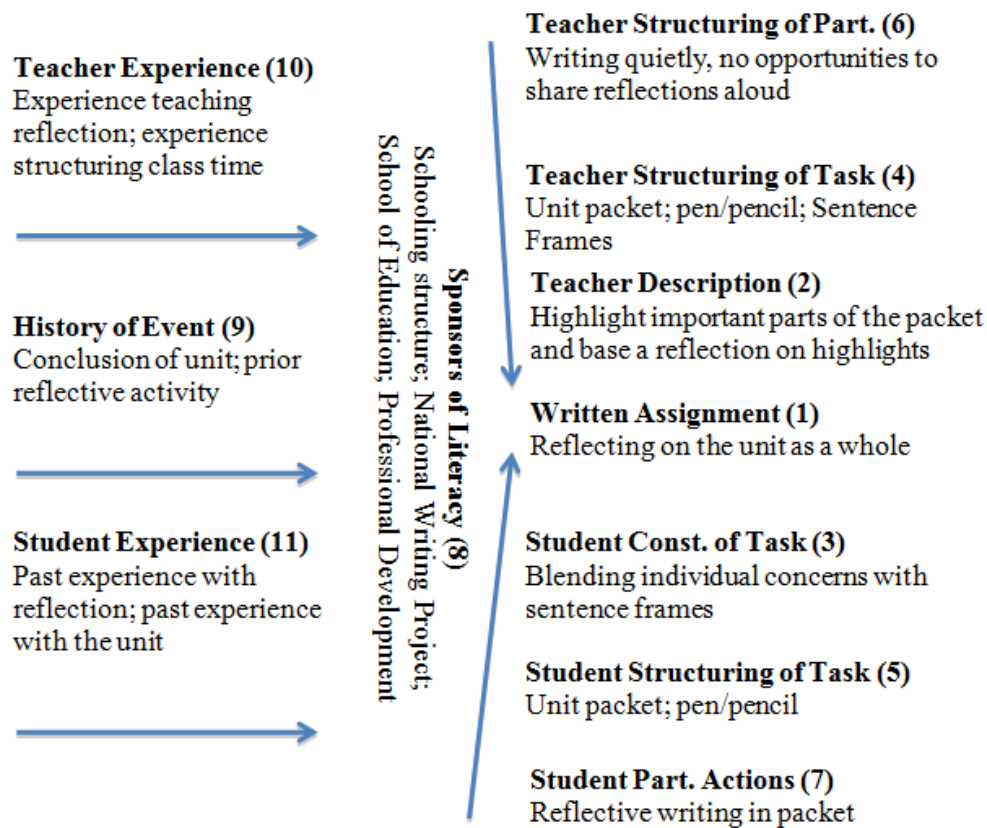
**Figure 5.41: Marianne Reflection on Blog Unit**



Marianne, unlike Clarence, reflects more regularly during her “Writing to Reframe” assignments. She, like Clarence and Alice, follows the sentence frames that Emily poses for her students. Much like Clarence, she is concerned with adding pictures and videos to her blog, something that she later adds successfully. A review of the packet that Marianne was reflecting on shows that she identified a fact early on in the packet to write for her opening sentence, suggesting that, while she was working, she was also attempting to blend her own writing activity with what she saw as the expectations of the class. In this reflective activity, then, Marianne begins addressing her own needs and issues through the structures created by Emily, instead of approaching her “Writing to Reframe” in the formulaic way that she has in previous units. Furthermore, her breaking away from Emily’s frames allows her a material connection to her next blog writing activity that will help her add the pictures she wishes to add.

In the literate act below, Marianne is seen building from the sentence frames provided to her to identify subjects for her reflective writing that is appropriate for the purpose that Emily has set out for it. That is, Marianne takes the “space” for writing provided by Emily, structures that space through the sentence starters that Emily provides, and creates a response within that space that “counts” as appropriate writing in Emily’s eyes. Within this work, however, Marianne also takes steps forward in the ways in which she goes about writing activity. That is, she brings up for discussion elements that can help her in her later writing activity.

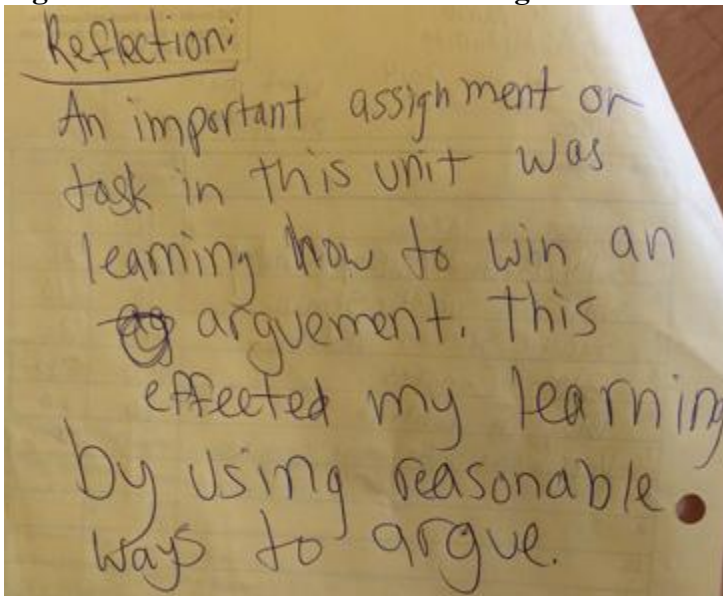
**Figure 5.42: Marianne's Reflective Literate Act**



As Marianne moves forward into other literate acts, the experience that she has in this literate act moves along the material connections of intertextuality, genre sets, and activity systems into the other work that she completes in later classroom writing activity.

Marianne’s concern about adding photos and video to her blog writing serves as a springboard for her later writing activity—one that brings issues of revision to the fore, as indicated in the “Writing to Perform” literate act. Essentially, Marianne uses the talk, tools, and texts around her to build a response to the “Writing to Reframe” purpose that fuels a future learning moment and shapes her awareness of revision in a later “Writing to Perform” act. This learning is much more tightly grounded to the nuances of blog writing, particularly when compared with the work of Alexis as she generalized her knowledge about argument writing.

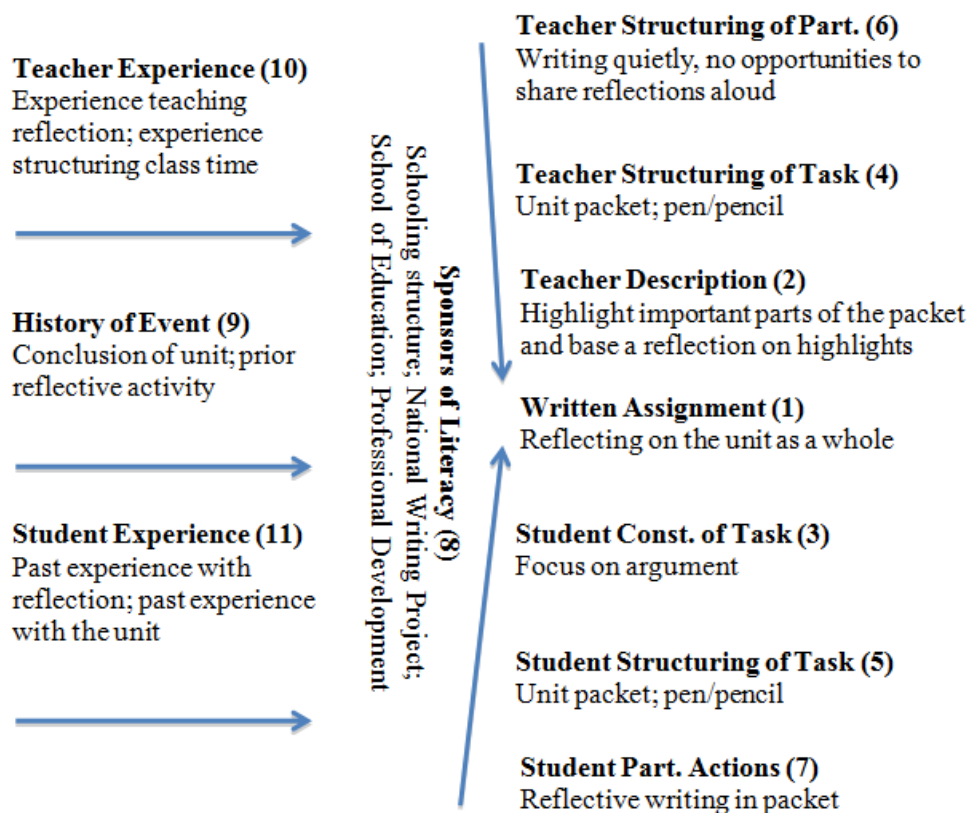
**Figure 5.43: Alexis’ Reflection on Blog Unit**



Alexis, like Holly, also uses the reflective writing assignment to go beyond the walls of the classroom, and she does it with the language that Emily uses throughout the unit. Emily, like many teachers I have observed, frequently generalizes about the world beyond the immediate classroom, telling students, for example, that “learning to argue” in this setting will be effective in other settings as well. Alexis takes this to heart in her “Writing to Reframe,” although whether she ends up following up on this in other literate acts outside of

the classroom, of course, is not seen. Alexis very interestingly signals that the purpose of the unit was to learn to win an argument, but expands on her outside application by claiming that she has learned to use “reasonable ways to argue.” In this “Writing to Reframe” activity, Alexis has drawn from the language of the classroom that Emily used throughout the unit to create a response that “counts” for points and progress in Emily’s class while also building a bridge to other literate acts outside of school. Of course, being as it is only a single bridge into other literate acts, it remains to be seen whether the connection pays off. However, Alexis’ attempt to expand beyond the classroom walls represents a first for her in her “Writing to Reframe,” and suggests possible future connections as she continues to wind all of the learning in this class together.

**Figure 5.44: Argument Focus by Alexis**



In her “Writing to Reframe” activity, Alexis takes advantage of the reflection writing by pushing forward her own understanding of argument, and situating that understanding within life beyond the walls of the classroom. As can be seen in her writing activity, Alexis has generalized her understanding of argument writing in this instance by considering her learning a way to “win an argument.” In this instance, we can see Alexis making sense of argumentative writing in the larger context of argument, and pulling together her understanding of the activities she engages in through that sense-making activity. That is, as Alexis takes participative action to write her reflective piece, she also identifies specifically what “argumentative writing” is and what she can do with it. This understanding of argumentative writing shapes not only this reflective piece, but her later argumentative benchmark writing through the CARR model of arguing. Her understanding of the immediate demands of CARR argument writing is filtered through her larger associations with the term “argument,” and it is in this initial writing activity that these understandings become explicitly clear both for her and for this research project.

In this reflective writing activity, students did not bring together their understandings and experiences in new and different ways: Clarence identified something he had not learned, Nick mentioned something he learned and a question he still had, and Alexis attempted to tie her learning to the larger goals of the unit. During this activity, Emily’s students completed something that, on the surface, seemed like the same activity that they would complete during at the conclusion of many of their units. However, when compared to later reflective activities, it becomes clear that the kinds of reflection that students were asked to complete became more complex as the year ground on.

Through a close look at the writing that students complete during the reflective activity, students can be seen writing assignments with different levels of complexity, intertextual support, and established connections across genre sets and systems over time. Emily provided her students with opportunities to “Write to Reframe” with a variety of different tools as the school year moved along, and students took both the tools and the opportunities up in different ways and with different results. The tools, talk, and texts available to students led students to construct different kinds of literate acts under the same activity heading, such as “reflective activity.”

The various writing that each student completes represents different orchestrations of activities around the act of writing. Holly brings together a great many elements in her writing packet to construct her reflective activity. Alice, on the other hand, remains focused on what might be termed the more affective components of the “River Teeth” unit: her ability to remember past experiences that stood out to her. Clarence, Marianne, and Alexis, on the other hand, raise questions focused on the act of blog writing. Each of these students have taken a step forward, then, in their integration of their experiences so that it may act as a material connection to further literate acts. Holly’s integration for her reflective writing not only continues in future reflections, but echoes the internalization of her attention to the structure of entire texts as well as her attention to nuanced grammatical features. Alice values the writing activity of the “River Teeth” writing, although she does not take it in any clear direction. Marianne, Alexis, and Clarence, however, bring up issues that they can possibly take up in later blog entries—an act, in fact, that Marianne ends up carrying out. Marianne wonders how to add pictures and videos to her logs, and ends up resolving this question in her own blog writing revisions later in the school year. In each of these examples,

then, we see students appropriating the “Writing to Reframe” purpose for their own purposes, creating material connections to other literate acts for further writing development, and doing so with the tools available around them during the writing process.

The reflective activities that the students complete throughout the year introduces students to the reflective power of writing while also highlighting, for our research purposes, the power of the layered history of schooling on classroom writing activity (i.e., time and material limitations, expectations for student activity). Schooling structure, as evidenced by the available sponsors of literacy in the literate acts of the reflective activities, shape what the students can do, should do, and must do in order to perform activities that “count” as classroom participation. In short, the reflective activities indicate the larger genre and activity systems that comprise the classroom community. Furthermore, the interlocking genre sets that serve as material connections among chains of literate acts indicate how writing development follows the pathways set up by distant social structures.

**Table 5.12: Key "Writing to Reframe" Takeaways**

<b>Key Takeaways from These Literate Acts</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Students can take up the same writing activity for different purposes.</li><li>2. Students can advance in multiple, socially complex ways through a single writing act.</li><li>3. Student writing activity draws from the structures surrounding the students in order to organize and execute specific writing tasks.</li><li>4. Students situate their learning within the complexities of their social lives and out-of-class understandings.</li></ol>

**Writing to write.** Throughout the school year, Emily’s students often wrote for the purpose of putting words on paper—at least, this was Emily’s intention with many of the assignments. Not all of these intentions were successful, of course, although the “Writer’s Notebook”-based activities were often the most successful in encouraging students to write simply for enjoyment of the act of writing.



Several characteristics determined that Emily was encouraging students in a “Writing to Write” purpose. The primary (and most powerful) of these characteristics was the lack of a grade. In the Writer’s Notebooks, for example, the students would receive a certain amount of credit for writing a certain length (say, half a page), but they would not be graded on the content. This is, of course, similar to much of the other writing that students do that is not “Writing to Perform,” but it is an important criterion nevertheless.

The second characteristic that separated “Writing to Write” from the other purposes above was what I refer to as a “lack of continuation” in the assignment. When students “Wrote to Write,” they were not writing in order to *do* anything in the future (such as the “Writing to Prepare” purpose). While students would occasionally share their writing (“Writing to Participate”), this was often not discussed ahead of time, and the sharing was limited compared to other “Writing to Participate” moments—Emily often minimized the number of sharers to only two or three people on the rare occasions that “Writing to Write” carried forward into sharing.

The third characteristic separating “Writing to Write” from the other purposes above was the way in which the content of the text was disconnected from the other writing that the students were asked to do. When students “Write to Write,” they write about whatever comes to mind. While occasional assignments—such as the “River Writing” unit—directed students to certain kinds of memories and experiences, this was still in no way connected to the literary content that the students discussed throughout the school year.

Three particularly clear moments of writing activity encapsulate the development of literate acts among students while they are “Writing to Write:” Rachel, Alice, and Dan as they work through their “River Writing” unit activity at the conclusion of the year.

*Rachel, Alice, and Dan record their “River Teeth” experiences.* During the very last unit of the year, Emily had her students complete a two-week “River Teeth” unit. This unit was an experience-centered writing unit, and allowed students the chance to bring their personal lives further into classroom writing than they had earlier in the year. During a May 21 lesson with the class, Emily introduced the idea of “River Teeth” with the following explanation:

Our next unit of study is called “River Teeth” and somebody asked earlier today “What does that mean?” You know how in your notebook you were saying “River Teeth?” Today I’m going to tell you what that means and it’s our last unit of study. I think it’s probably the easiest writing that we’re going to do all year for me it’s the most fun I don’t know if it’ll be fun for you but it’s fun for me. And it’s based on this book called *River Teeth: Stories and Writing* by David James Duncan. But today I’m going to ask the Climate Person<sup>8</sup> to turn off the lights so that’s \*\*\*\*\*; \*\*\*\*\* would you turn off the lights? And just take a breath, let your shoulders down, put your feet flat on the floor, put your pencil down, and you’re just going to make some observations. Um, before we start I want to call your attention to that poster that’s next to Snaily<sup>9</sup> and remind you that we’re here in English to increase our knowledge of the language itself which is what we do with the sentence

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<sup>8</sup> About a quarter of the class is assigned a job during each academic quarter of the school year. Emily’s “Climate Person” is responsible for opening and closing the door, the blinds, and the windows, in addition to being responsible for the lights.

<sup>9</sup> Snaily is an aptly named inflatable toy snail that rests on top of Emily’s filing cabinets.

combining, improve our communication skills, and appreciate the artistry of literature. We're doing all three of those things with this assignment but today we're doing observing. So see "Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, Observing?" I'm going to show you a few images and I want you to use your best observational skills.

Emily's introduction to the unit was contextually anchored to the activity that the students were about to engage in. First, she brought up the interesting term "River Teeth," something she heard students conversing about earlier in the lesson. Next, she directed student attention to the "Purpose of the Class" poster that she had on her wall. Finally, she used that poster to specify an activity that the students were to perform: observation. This pattern of interaction directed student attention and activity toward pictures associated with the reading that she was about to complete, which was the opening of *River Teeth*. The pictures were of rivers in the Pacific northwest, which was the setting of many of the *River Teeth* excerpts the students would read (and where the term "river teeth" was first heard by the author).

After the students were able to discuss the Pacific Northwest briefly, Emily read her students an excerpt from *River Teeth*, an excerpt that explained where the author heard the term, what he thought of it, and how it related to the writing that the students would do. Emily told students that they would be writing down the "river teeth" from their own lives: memories (accurate or not) from their past that stuck with them for one reason or another.

In this lesson, Emily establishes a common definition of "river teeth" with her students, then passes out a packet that will help the students write out their river teeth experiences. During this activity, two students in particular stand out: Rachel and Alice.

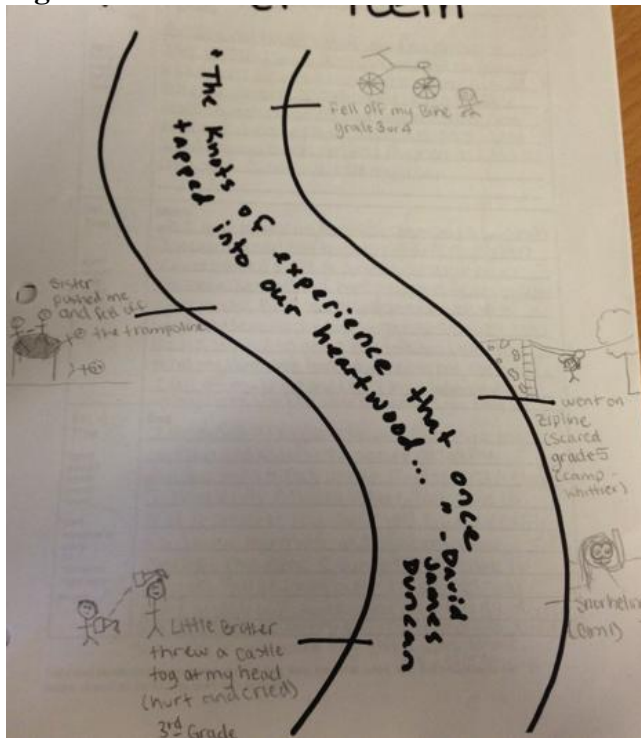
Both students receive a packet from Emily (as all of the students do), and both students follow the teacher's initial instructions to write their heading on the packet soon after they receive it. After this, Emily had students open to the "My River Teeth" page of the packet. On this page, Emily shares with her students several examples of her own river teeth, providing them with examples to draw from when they are writing on their own.

The actual writing of the "River Teeth" happened two lessons later: Emily's examples ran to the end of class, and the following class saw most of the students missing due to a National Honor Society meeting. During the May 23 lesson, however, students had the chance to expand upon their understandings of "river teeth" through a class discussion, and attempt to record their river teeth in their writing packets. It is during this last part of the lesson that Alice and Rachel can be seen getting to work.

These ten minutes consisted of them writing out their "river teeth" in the figures shown below. Engagement with other students is limited during this period, as Alice speaks to no one, and Rachel has only a few, brief exchanges with students in the group next to hers. The students are given ten minutes to write, and Emily frequently gives students different ways to think about their "river teeth," as well as different ways to fill in detail (colored pencils are offered for students who have all of their ideas written down).

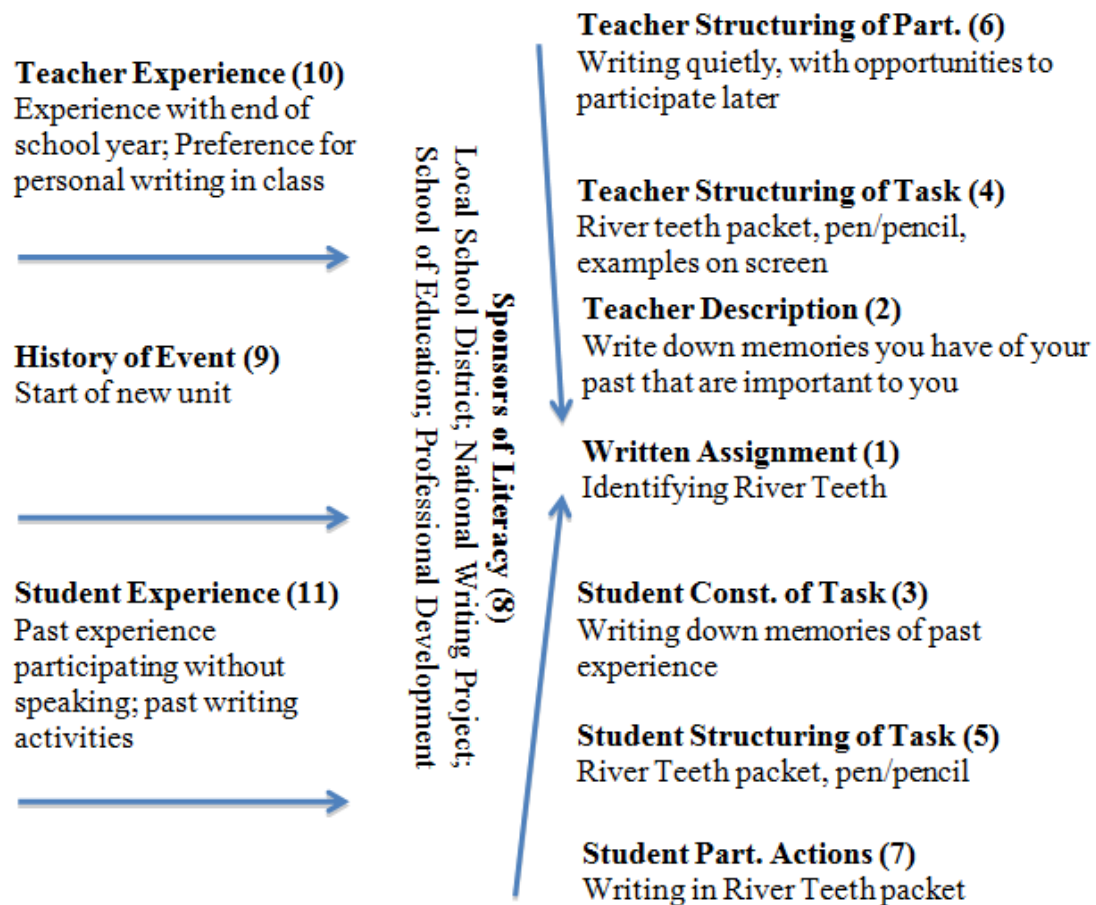
With approximately four minutes left in the writing period, both Alice and Rachel seem finished with their work. Rachel has sat back, listening to Emily explain something to the student behind her, and Alice is resting her head on her dominant hand. Alice has a second burst of ideas during the last two minutes of writing, but her activity has noticeably slowed in the second half of the ten-minute writing period.

**Figure 5.45: Alice's River Teeth**



Alice comes up with one more “river teeth” experience than the spaces Emily has provided on the sheet, and she accompanies each moment with a picture, although the pictures are not colored in. While it is notable that four of her five examples involve fear and/or injury, what is perhaps more important in terms of writing activity development is the order that she puts them in: instead of putting her “river teeth” in a kind of chronological order, Alice instead chooses to put them in a random order, with third grade examples bracketing each side and other older or undated events in between. This is particularly interesting because she wrote them all in pencil, and she easily could have rearranged them if she had wanted to, seeing how she had the time.

**Figure 5.46: Alice's River Teeth Literate Act**



Alice, as shown in the literate act breakdown above, is able to align the talk, tools, and texts in her exposures to the talk, tools, and texts in the exposures of Emily, and she is able to do so while drawing from her past experience with participating (via writing) without speaking whenever possible. In this activity, however, Alice only writes down four “River Teeth.” However, these four provide her with the variety that she needs in order to take on the later, more complicated writing activities that develop. This “river teeth” writing piece, then, serves as a genre in a complex genre set that sets Alice up for later writing success.

This literate act of writing down and illustrating her experiences are carried forward into her later river teeth writing, as she uses two of these events to complete her river teeth assignments. Despite taking the rules of the “river teeth” writing slightly into her own hands

by avoiding the chronological order, Alice is still able to “Write to Write” in a way that carries forward for her into her longer “river teeth” writing assignments. By using the structure provided by Emily, Alice is able to record events that will prove useful to her in future moments, something envisioned by Emily in her construction of the task. The material connection of the genre set carries her writing in this literate act into her future literate acts, all of which are deemed successful by Emily and contribute to her high grade at the end of the quarter.

In addition to serving merely as material connections for Alice’s later writing activity, these links also serve as evidence of the development of writing activity in Alice. While Alice does draw heavily from her past work in the classroom, she also uses this moment to begin reconfiguring how she works with multiple texts on long, multi-draft writing pieces. That is, instead of using the artifacts from the literate act shown above merely as a tool for later writing, she uses it in several ways to expand her thoughts on her topic. The initial writing that Alice does is followed by some rudimentary drawing, both of which shape the rough draft of her longer writing piece. By attending multimodally to the topic that she originally addressed, Alice is able to create a much more vivid account of her river teeth memory in her later writing.

Since the river teeth unit happened at the end of the year, it is difficult to see exactly how the individual changes noticed pan out. However, Alice’s use of writing to redirect her thoughts both mesh with her earlier work throughout the year (as she attempted to avoid working with or speaking to others) and serve as a profound enough shift to suggest that the literate act change will endure.

Compare Alice’s “river teeth” initial writing with Rachel’s, shown below. Rachel, while having no illustrations of events, includes far more—14, to Alice’s 5. These events, however, often lack detail, and since Rachel does not have time to fill out 14 “river teeth” stories, many of them end here. Like Alice, however, two of them move onward and become part of the more extensive “river teeth” assignments, just as Emily was hoping for in her organization of the unit. Unlike Alice’s writing, however, there is less context for Rachel to draw from as she brought her experience from the “My River Teeth” page to her more extensive assignments.

Both Rachel and Alice definitely constructed texts in one literate act that they were able to take to another in this writing activity. The question remains, however, what is it about this carrying of text that signifies change in the writing activity of the students?

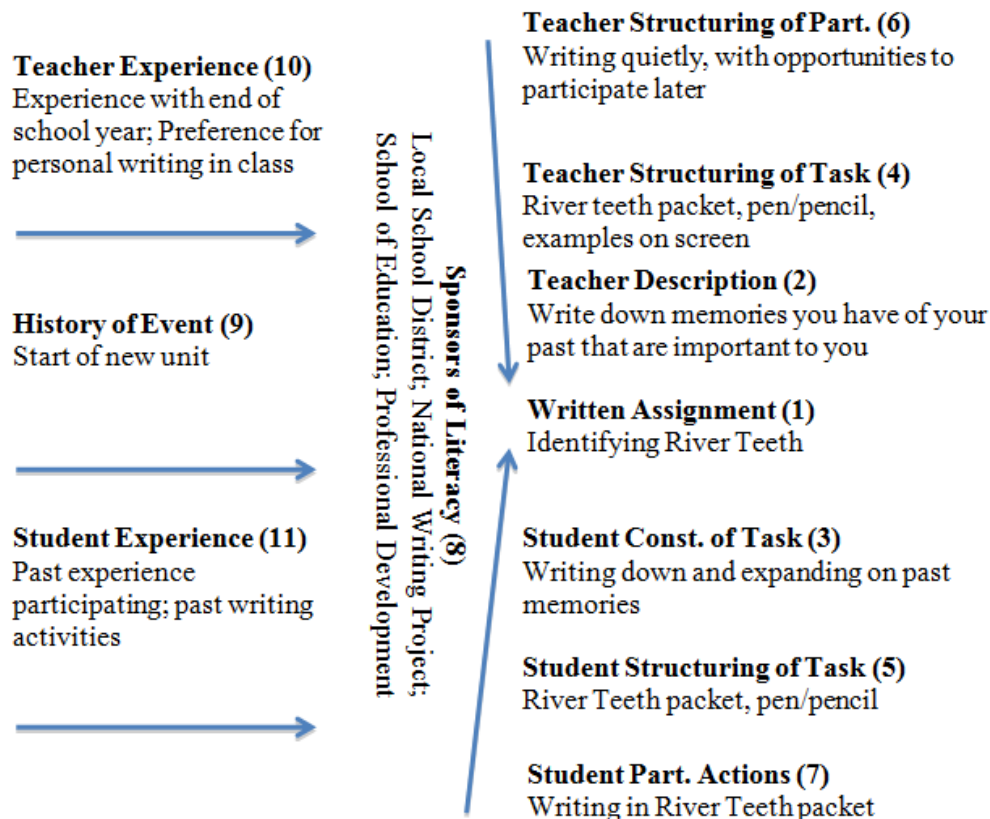
The answer to this question can be found in the increased awareness of audience that is perceived by the students engaged in this “Writing to Write” activity. During the “My River Teeth” writing activity, the students show significant buy-in to the idea of writing down the memories that have stuck in their minds over time. Both Alice and Rachel include negative events, and both of them think far back into their past experiences—third grade for Alice, and second grade for Rachel (and perhaps even earlier for Rachel – she does not always date her events in the “My River Teeth” page).

The literate act graphic below shows Rachel’s exposures for writing down her river teeth. Note that many of these exposures follow similar lines to Alice. A key difference, and one that suggests Rachel’s writing activity is beginning to shift according to the demands of various, overlapping audiences, is the way in which Rachel uses the “River Teeth” initial writing to write down a host of ideas for further possible expansion. Rachel does not reign



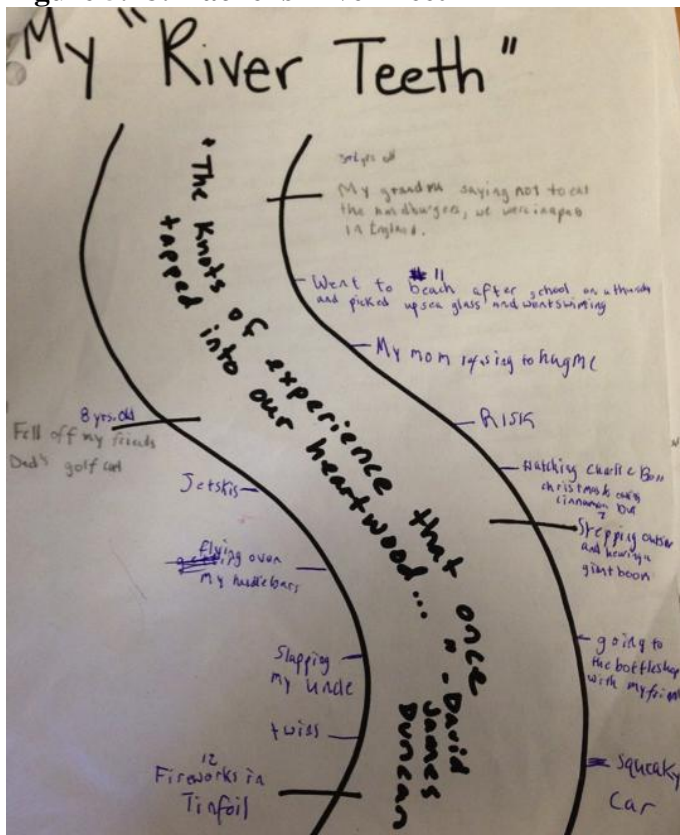
herself in at all during this period—she lists a wide range of positive and negative experiences, and this provides her with a wealth of tools to draw from in her later writing activity.

**Figure 5.47: Rachel's River Teeth Literate Act**



As Rachel works with different talk, tools, and texts in various exposures in order to identify a list of her river teeth, she moves about selecting what to work from to further elaborate on these experiences. Her work, in this case, stems from an increasing understanding of the social nuances around her, culminating in several finished “River Teeth” products that meet Emily’s demands for writing as well as the class’s expectations for sharing at the end of the unit.

**Figure 5.48: Rachel's River Teeth**



When the students move over to the more extensive writing pieces, their selections belie an awareness of audience that is not present in the “My River Teeth” page. Both students write terse entries for that, and include memories that occur to them without seeming to consider the level of interest in each “tooth.” During the more extensive pieces, however, both Rachel and Alice choose moments that are relatable to their other students, allow them to follow the rules that Emily sets up for them (i.e., including sensory words), and can have a clear beginning, middle, and end. By having a list of writing to draw from to begin with, Emily provides the students with a smoother process of selecting strong stories for students to write about, and in the process provides an avenue for students to think more carefully about the audiences they are writing for.

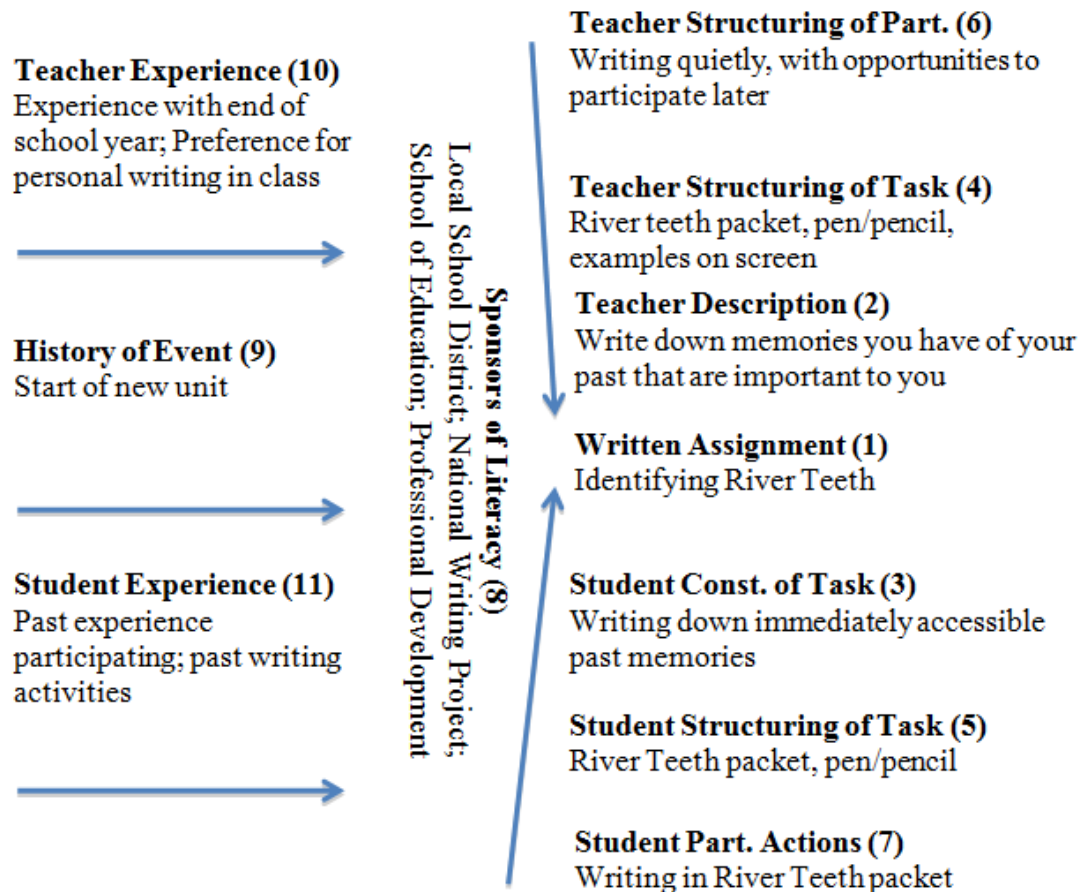
Dan orchestrates his activity around “River Teeth” writing. Later in the “River Teeth” unit, Dan engaged in some of the more extensive writing that Alice and Rachel get into later. During the May 28 lesson, Emily told students at the beginning of class that “Today our goal is for you to get both of your narratives at least drafted out.” Emily underscores the importance of imagery through short activities before getting into individual writing, giving Dan an additional structure that he can, should he choose, work with when he begins his “river teeth” writing assignment.

I chose to examine Dan’s writing because he was noticeably brief in his “My River Teeth” worksheet, including only two items: attending a summer camp, and getting hit in the eye with a baseball. I found this interesting because, although he had the amount of river teeth moments required to complete his activities, he did not leave himself with a great many options. Alice and Rachel both had multiple moments to choose from for each of their longer “river teeth” entries, so they were able to more easily meet the demands that Emily placed on the longer entries—demands such as specific times, specific places, and the use of imagery. Dan was able to accomplish most of this with his examples, although he was noticeably weaker in specifying times and places than the writing that Alice and Rachel were able to complete.

The figure below shows the slight differences between Dan’s literate act and those of the others studied in this subsection. The biggest shift for Dan (and the one that most severely impacted his future writing) was the lack of detail on River Teeth moments. Students, after listing their “River Teeth” moments, were required to expand on them in some detail in a story. Students like Alice, who had several options to work from, or Rachel, who had even more to work from, found this to be a fast-moving activity, since they were able to

draw from a collection of experiences instead of being limited to just a few. As Dan moved from this literate act into more extensive writing pieces, the brief work of his on this piece turned into a hazard for him.

**Figure 5.49: Dan's Literate Act**



Dan's decisions about using the talk, tools, and texts that can be seen in Exposure 3 limit his options for later writing activity, a tendency of Dan's that, before now, had not clearly and deleteriously influenced his more extensive writing pieces. As a result, Dan had to more carefully represent the moments that he did have to get full credit on his writing assignments—which he was, at the end of the unit, able to do.

In the end, then, Dan was able to fulfill the “Writing to Write” purpose adequately for Emily, although the bulk of his effort had shifted from the careful selection of a moment to

the appropriate representation of a limited set of moments. His initial literate act of finding only two moments were not as helpful to him as the literate acts that Alice and Rachel performed in the same moment. He was still able to complete his assignments, but the act of completing those assignments left him unable to work with detailed times and places (and, in the case of one of his texts, even imagery) in the way that Emily was asking the students to do. This does not mean that Dan was actively rebelling or looking for another kind of writing to perform, but rather that the structure of his performance did not allow him to approach certain aspects of writing (i.e., writing imagery, specifying time and place) to the degree that Emily was hoping her students would. In this chain of literate acts, then, Dan's weak start keeps his writing from elevating throughout.

**Table 5.13: Key "Writing to Write" Takeaways**

Key Takeaways from These Literate Acts
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sponsors of literacy are at work with and against one another.</li> <li>2. Writing tends to overlap in this classroom: writing in one moment becomes an important resource for writing in other moments.</li> <li>3. Students can structure the teacher's participative structures, at times, toward their own ends and preferences.</li> <li>4. Audience tends to multiply in number and in location throughout the course of writing activity development in students at this age.</li> </ol>

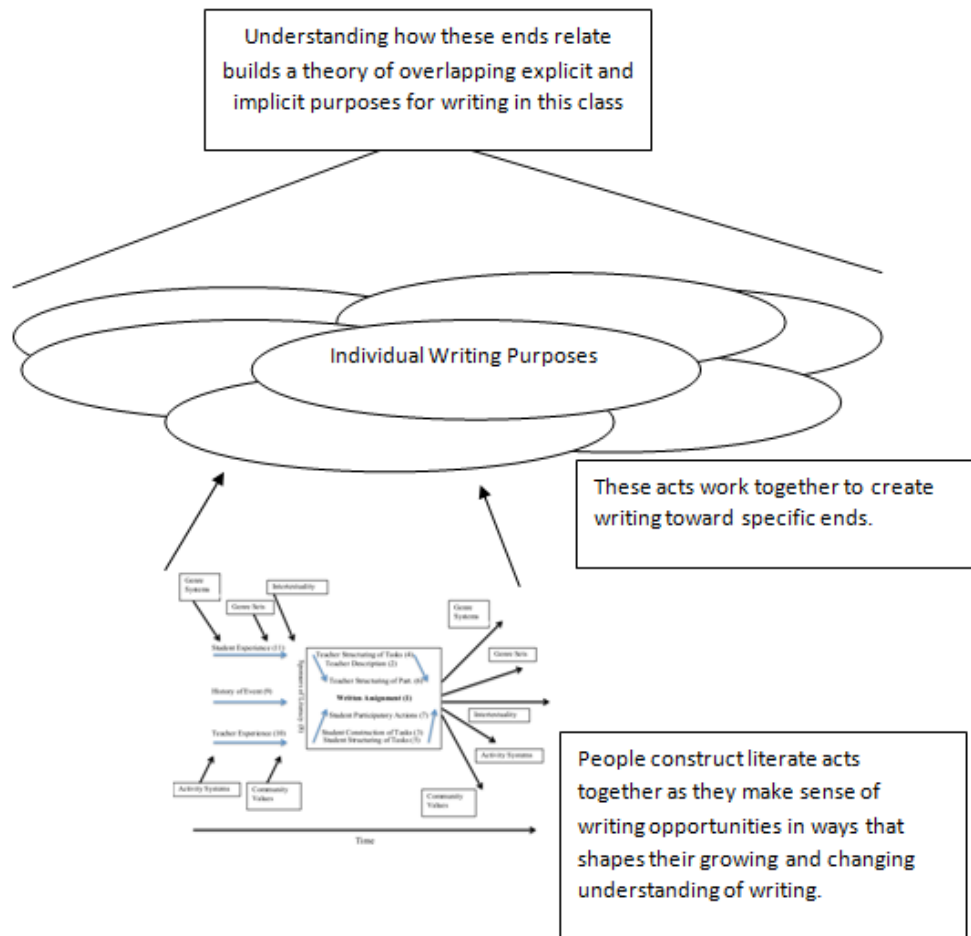
### **Consistencies and Patterns Across Literate Acts**

The examples posed above were selected for two reasons. First, the literate act examined met the required evidence established in chapter four. Second, the literate act itself served as one of many moments of literate act development in the yearlong activity of that student. Selecting specific snapshots of literate activity and examining them through multiple exposures that clearly showed enduring change in the writing activity of students cut down drastically the number of literate acts needing examination, as, during many literate acts, enduring shifts in activity cannot normally be clearly seen. Breaking each literate act

down through exposures to identify the purpose of the instructor, and pairing that to the purposes of the students involved also provided clarity on how the interaction among students and the teacher worked out and shaped the development of writers both in specific moments and over time.

The literate act analysis, building from the grounded theory analysis, showed the complex social activity at work in any given moment of writing. Furthermore, it allowed me, as the researcher, to peel back specific collections of talk, tools, and texts to better understand how one person's fragile, permeable realities were carried forward and transformed through interactions with other people and various objects. Within each literate act, the exposures allowed me to pull out individual decisions and activities to understand not just how a person was making sense of a given moment, but how that sense-making within a specific moment could alter in enduring, patterned ways, all the while maintaining the multiple, overlapping purposes for writing that carried across the school year.

**Figure 5.50: Interaction of Literate Acts, Purposes, and Theories of Writing in This Classroom**



The table above indicates the wide variety of activity that occurs during the complex perpetuation of the writing purposes in Emily's classroom. As individual students make sense of writing opportunities differently, they engage with the talk, tools, and texts around them differently toward those ends. These changes lead them to different literate act constructions, which create differently understood opportunities for taking up writing activity in the future. However, within this immense variety of taking up talk, tools, and texts around them in different combinations, each of these students also, through his or her own actions, contributes to a larger series of overlapping purposes established at the start of the chapter.

The seven purposes of writing that Emily's exposures present to students are taken up by these actors within these various literate acts in ways that enhance, shift, challenge, and sometimes negate the initial purpose for which Emily intends writing. This back-and-forth interaction between student and teacher, itself situated within the historical context not only of this particular collection of students but also the history of schooling, education, literacy, and writing in general, shows how the contextual "noise" within which writing occurs shapes writing activity development. Furthermore, this contextually-situated examination of changes in student writing activity has also revealed consistencies, patterns in that writing development that will, in the next chapter, be carried forward into answers to the research questions proposed at the start of this study. For the moment, however, the details of these patterns and consistencies are worth bearing out.

One of the most important findings (in that it shaped the subsequent findings) of this study was the ways in which **Emily and her students drew from the structure of the school day to shape their understandings of classroom activity and drive forward subsequent writing activity**. This finding separates the study that I have performed here with other studies of classroom activity that tend to situate the activity of a given classroom activity as the ongoing work of individuals in the classroom. While this is to some extent true, the consistent references to expected activities, past activities, and understandings of upcoming activities point toward an established structure in the classroom that has historic value for participants as a solid, reliable structure upon which future action can be built.

In all of the literate acts examined above, individual students use the structure of the school day and the class lesson plan as a starting point for engaging in writing activity. These expectations are historically situated in two ways: first, in the development of the daily



lesson in Emily's classroom; second, in the historical location of the school, the classroom, the teachers, and the students.

Through and with these structural components, Emily used the talk, tools, and texts shown through Exposures 2, 4, and 6 to create **writing assignments that served various purposes: organization, preparation, performance, participation, expansion, reframing, and writing.** Emily had students write for these purposes to accomplish the goals of her lessons and units while also propelling her students toward an understanding of the purposes of English Language Arts in seventh grade.

While students were engaged with these writing purposes, they often used the talk, tools, and texts in Exposures 3, 5, and 7, along with their understanding of the activity as seen through Exposure 9 and their individual past schooling experiences seen in Exposure 11 to accomplish their own goals both through writing and through speaking with the people around them. **The taking up of talk, tools, texts, and others for their own purposes was regulated by what was in their proximity.** The surrounding environment of the students shaped how students went about writing and altered their understandings of that writing. This interaction with writing through their contexts leads students to shaky, situational understandings that can turn into combinations of conscious and habitual activities that change writing substantially and long term.

The shaky, situational understandings that emerge from orchestrations of talk, tools, and texts around people tend to sustain themselves over time under certain circumstances. **The situation must carry forward through talk, tools, and texts into future writing situations in some way.** If the terminology established, the tools used, and the texts taken up do not appear in future sets of literate acts, the likelihood of transferring writing activity

from one situation to another is not high. Without a clear line—either through material connections or exposure overlaps—meaningful changes in the writing activity of students cannot be sustained.

**There must also be opportunities for talk, tools, and texts from the situation to be taken up again.** That is, the talk, tools, and texts may not simply be passive agents in a new writing situation but must constitute a powerful force in it. The literate acts shown earlier in this chapter provide sustained changes in activity because the talk, tools, and texts taken up in those moments are offered as available sense-making options in future situations. The re-appearance of specific talk, tools, and texts in other situations provides handholds for students as they collaboratively construct new writing opportunities.

Some of these chances for new understandings to take hold and carry forward into other situations are not always noticeable through the actual writing, since **writing activity shifts are not always apparent on the page**. Student writing activity may pave the way for future changes in student writing, but those changes may be a long time coming. The conceptual underpinnings may take time to develop, or the material connections may be drawn from slowly, so that the changes in writing activity do not emerge on the page until a much later date. Furthermore, **students may change what they do on the page in ways that do not endure through the structuring of the teacher by the talk, tools, and texts present in Exposures 2, 4, and 6**. When Emily provided her students with an abundance of writing frames during the Hero's Journey unit, for example, students engaged in many kinds of changed writing activities that did not sustain themselves when the focus of the writing shifted.

Findings from the examination of these literate acts also indicate that **students are more likely to develop rich, sustained writing understandings and activities if their interactions with those around them mesh with the writing that they are doing.** When students (and the teacher) talk about writing in ways that reflect the writing that is actually happening, there is a greater chance for the new understandings to take hold and carry forward. This overlap of talk with activity provides further material connections and exposure links that the actor in a given moment can use to further perpetuate the new organization.

The final finding that has emerged from this work has been the understanding that **changes in writing activity are linked with changing pressures in sponsors of literacy.** This is not always easily noticeable in studies of classroom writing, since students often encounter changes in sponsors of literacy not within a single classroom but as students move from one classroom (or grade level) to another. However, because Emily worked to push her own idea of what valuable reading and writing was into her classroom along with the kinds of literacy sponsored by the Common Core, the California Department of Education, and other sponsoring pressures, a great deal of sponsorshaping can be seen at the classroom level that shows writing activity development happening in conjunction with shifting sponsorship use. These nine findings, together, suggest that students engage in incremental, seemingly disconnected changes in writing that add up over time and reshape the writing that students do, as well as the ways in which they consider it. In the next chapter, I rely on this final conclusion, as well as individual findings, to construct answers to the research questions proposed at the start of chapter one.

The nine findings discussed above underscore the importance of studying writing activity development. By examining how students engaged in literate acts over time, this study was able to show how the students changed their writing and their writing processes in dynamic, ever-shifting ways that, through the help of material connections, sometimes turned into enduring reorganized phenomena. In the next chapter, I draw on the findings from this chapter to construct answers to the research questions posed in chapter one, and situate those findings theoretically while I do so. This sets up a theoretically informed set of answers that are then, in chapter seven, extrapolated into a middle range theory about writing activity development for students at this level.

## **Chapter Six: Literate Acts and the Remediation of Structure**

In this chapter, I expand the findings of chapter five outward—connecting them to the larger social structures that constitute them and examining their impact on those structures. I also connect them to the continually-unfolding realities of the individuals involved in the literate acts, and identify how the reality of each actor serves as a social fact in the reality of all of the other actors in the situation. This notion of interacting reality leads me toward the concept of remediation, which I address in regard to the literate acts I have studied. From that concept of remediation, I construct a perception of a universe of literate acts. Each of these issues—reproduced social structure, reinforced and reinforcing realities, remediation, and a universe of literate acts—serves as a necessary tool in presenting answers to the research questions identified at the start of chapter one. Once the answers to all of the research questions are completed, I use those findings to bridge into the final chapter, which examines the practical, methodological, and theoretical concerns that arose from these findings and the interpretation of those findings.

### **The Reproduction of Social Structure in Literate Acts**

Within the literate acts that were studied, as well as the structure of the classroom and the writing within it, the reproduction and remediation of social structure is powerfully evident. The actions of Emily and her students are based on the talk, tools, and text that reach into their worlds from distant localities and—in using those talk, tools, and texts—reproduce the social structures that brought them to the situation of their interaction. While the co-constructors of a given situation cannot necessarily influence the deeply smoothed paths of connections across different localities, their interactions do influence the ways in which the materials that move along those paths are taken up within the situation, and, as a

result, influence the ways in which talk, tools, and text may project themselves along other paths into other localities. For instance, when Emily did not perceive a great deal of take-up of sentence variety through her sentence-combining activities by year's end, she made a change to her curriculum for the following school year by cutting down on sentence combining and leaning more heavily toward independent reading and writing. The locality (i.e., time and place) of the 2014-2015 school year and the actions of the students within it led to a differently-structured future locality through the power of Emily's sponsorshaping skills.

The reproduction of social structure also occurs on a day-to-day basis, as students and teachers reproduced the common activities of the classroom. As I demonstrate above, activities with the same label—such as a “Do Now” or a benchmark exam—actually vary widely in their day-to-day reproduction and in individual perceptions of them. However, through the common understandings that the class establishes for what counts as a “Do Now” or a benchmark, those in the classroom are able to reproduce those structures in similar (if not exactly the same) ways throughout the school year. Students reproduce and remediate the structure around them in ways that support and refine their own understandings of what is happening while often drawing from the aligned realities that other people bring to the situation. Nick's separation of interaction with his peers from his writing led to a muted understanding of the concept of “Upstanders,” something that impacted his writing practices, if not the final grade on his writing. This reproduction of the social structure of interactions within school both enabled him to accomplish tasks while also limiting certain options for development, limitations that impacted the activity of the classroom as a whole.

This day-to-day reproduction of social structure contributes to the larger social structure of the world in several ways. Students learn how to “student,” or to behave in ways that are agreed-upon norms within a school, through the construction of social order via interaction over time. This results in the kinds of negotiated classroom structures presented at the start of chapter five. As students grow, they begin to see the world through their position as students, developing an inclination to activate certain talk, tools, and texts in the world in certain ways to accomplish certain, specifiable goals. By working through these understandings, students reproduce the classroom via their own activity in ways that support disparate, distant other elements of the complex activity systems that make up Goodland Middle School in particular and the educational system of California and the U.S. in general.

When students attend school, they perform a social, historical, and economic act. Students enter schools to both understand and contribute to what counts as “studenting.” In doing so, they interact with the historically layered nature of schooling and bring that forward in time, bringing with it the complex bureaucratic mechanics that propel that historically layered structure forward. In order to prepare for school, students purchase clothes, school supplies, food, etc. Once they are in school, they use both their own supplies and those of the school, increase the wear and tear on school material by participating in classroom activity (even if only by sitting there) and indicate needs that the school has to address through their activities. Even as students go about developing as writers throughout the course of their time in school, which may even lead them to new understandings about writing that go against the grain of the accepted writing of school, they contribute to the vast social, historical, and economic engine that perpetuates the American school system forward in time.

This perpetuation can be seen at the level of literate acts: as students go about putting alphanumeric text on a paper or a computer screen, they are drawing from a variety of resources, both physical (i.e., the iPads that students use in their classrooms) and ideological (i.e., the purposes toward which students are asked to write, which is shaped by powerful sponsors of literacy such as Pearson, etc.). Differences in the ways in which students go about drawing from these resources—as we see in the examples of the previous chapter—indicate development in the writing activity of students. Of course, on a level as low as a literate act, it does not appear that Emily’s students are reproducing much of importance: after all, the writing that students engage in the middle school classroom is not, to use the theoretical framework from chapter two, connected to other localities through deeply grooved links in the flat, uneven social world. Actually, the classroom *is* connected through deeply smoothed links, but the links are one-way streets: they run downhill from large institutions like Pearson, the California Department of Education, and Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium *into* the classroom. As a result, the literate acts that students engage in individually have little power for revolutionizing the way in which social culture is reproduced over time.

This is not to say that individuals have no power in the reproduction of society (see below for more), but rather that students in the classroom are not in a powerful position, so it is sometimes hard to see their actions as reproducing—or pulling forward in time—the social world of which they are part. Nevertheless, as can clearly be seen through the interactions of the classroom, these students—as well as their teacher—engage in interactions that call forth powerful, distant locations and put them to work with and against each other in their interactions as they make sense of the world around them. That their location does not have



the power to reach out and influence other locations does not negate the power that they do have to act in their immediate locations.

When students reproduce social structure through their use of talk, tools, and text, they do more than just keep society moving forward in time: their actions also bring forward, reproduce, extend, and inform their own realities of the world. Obviously, since the students are performing both a social reproduction and a reality reproduction at the same time, the two are intertwined in some way. However, for the purposes of understanding the results of this study, it is important to keep in mind not that the two are intertwined but that the actions of students serve to both reproduce their own individual reality and the larger social system of which they are part.

### **The Reproduction of Individuated Realities in Literate Acts**

This project uses the term “realities” in much the same sense that Mehan and Wood (1975a; 1975b) do when discussing the “realities” of ethnomethodology in research. This study’s understanding of reality, however, diverges from Mehan and Wood in one important way due to the focus of the phenomenon under study. Mehan and Wood were attempting to explain the reality that the frame of ethnomethodology created. Drawing from five conceptions of how the world works, Mehan and Wood construct a vision of ethnomethodology capable of examining realities at work. This study, however, is not a reflection on ethnomethodology but a study of the writing activity of students over time. Toward that end, this study defines reality as the history of activated talk, tools, and text that people bring with them into the construction of any given situation.

As people enter and construct a given situation, they bring with them the weight of their past experiences. These experiences serve as resources for them to help make sense of

new situations, and it is through the application of those past experiences—either consciously or unconsciously—that people construct and apply their realities. So, an individual will bring to the construction of a situation his or her own reality, which will work, in tandem with the realities of others in that situation, to sustain the situation and allow the individuals to work together in some way. These realities may be similar or different to greater or lesser degrees, but in some ways they are clearly and definitely different, since each individual has a different set of experiences from others.

Within the interactions that construct literate acts, people do more than reproduce and remediate the social structures of which they are part. They also extend, alter, and reproduce, to some extent, their own perceptions of reality. Furthermore, since each actor brings to any given situation his or her own reality, that reality becomes an active agent in the continued reproduction of the other realities of those in a given situation. In short, the reality of an individual leads to social actions that become objects in the realities of others. Within literate acts, then, we see the realities of others working with and against one another.

It would be wrong to say that the methodology of literate acts and the larger methodological concerns of grounded theory allow for researchers to see into the realities that individuals bring with them to activities. However, what these methods *do* provide is evidence of the talk, tools, and texts that students and teachers activate, and in what order they activate them, in order to construct their activities with others over time. From this repetition, researchers can draw some conclusions about what students perceive as their reality, how their sense of the world appears to them. This, of course, is verifiable only in its ability to predict the actions that students will take up, and in its ability to identify shifts in the taking-up of activity that student's evidence. However, this verification is sufficient for

helping researchers get a useful handle on how research subjects make sense of the world around them.

By tracing how students take up the world around them over time, researchers can identify how that taking-up of activity will conflict with and compliment the way other students take up the world around them in a given moment. In this clash (which, due to the interactional order that gets established among individuals, is often not as violent as the word “clash” would lead one to believe), the ways in which the reality of one person interacts with the reality of others can be usefully established. When we see students changing the way that they engage the talk, tools, and texts around them in order to establish a meaningful interactional order, we see realities working together to accomplish work. Of course, the ways in which each person responds to that change, and the ways in which those changes will be taken up by different people in the future, is more difficult to determine. However, revealing the interaction of realities makes the power of interactional order on the development of writing activity more clear: as students engage in different kinds of writing activity, they make sense of it through their interaction with others, and therefore those interactions contribute to their own unfolding realities and, thus, their understanding of what writing is and can do.

By tracing out the writing activity of students from different units across the year, this study has been able to identify, at least partially, the realities at work through the activity of students. It has also been able to show how these realities interact with one another, with one person’s reality appearing as a social fact in the realities of others that lead to re-organizations of interactional order. Considering interactions in this manner helps this study better understand the fragmented nature of writing activity development in large social

groups: as individuals interact and reach mutually-aligned meanings about what a writing activity is, or organize an interaction around writing, they take those meanings up in their own ways based on their own, individuated, complex realities. Viewed in this way, agreed-upon understandings do not overlap fully in every reality (although they may be close) and the individual development of the impacts of those understandings may diverge widely, but the agreed-upon understandings will remain agreed-upon enough to make classroom activity happen, the interactional order of the classroom remain intact, and the larger structure of the school system to continue to roll forward in time. With this understanding of how individual writing activity can perpetuate social structure even being radically altered in mind, we can now turn to specific answers to the research questions that draw from the findings of the analysis in chapter five.

### **Research Question 1: Writing Activity Development**

The first and driving question of this project concerned the writing activity of students: how does the writing activity of students develop throughout the course of the school year? In this study, the examination of literate acts by individual students over time showed that writing activity develops in a recursive manner through the realities of the actors in the social interactions that constitute the act of writing as they negotiate writing for various purposes with other actors in a writing situation. Because of the high quality of the research site, this study was able to show a wide range of writing activity from across the school year. Students engaged in many kinds of writing of varying depth, complexity, and duration.

**Table 6.1: Findings Applied to Answer RQ1**

Emily and her students drew from the structure of the school day to shape their understandings of classroom activity and drive forward subsequent writing activity
Emily created writing assignments that served various purposes: organization, preparation, performance, participation, expansion, reframing, and writing.
The taking up of talk, tools, texts, and others for students' own purposes was regulated by

what was in their proximity.
The situation must carry forward through talk, tools, and texts into future writing situations in some way.
There must also be opportunities for talk, tools, and texts from the situation to be taken up again.
Writing activity shifts are not always apparent on the page.
Students may change what they do on the page in ways that do not endure through the structuring of the teacher by the talk, tools, and texts present in Exposures 2, 4, and 6.
Students are more likely to develop rich, sustained writing understandings and activities if their interactions with those around them mesh with the writing that they are doing.

Within this widely varying activity of writing, students could orchestrate the laminated streams of activity that entered each writing site, and use that orchestration to complete the writing assignments they were given. Many of these activities were, even if in name only, repetitive. Students engaged in “Do Now” writing during almost every lesson; they wrote in their “Writer’s notebooks” every other week; they regularly recorded their reading in a highly specified format; and they were tested regularly in relation to the Common Core standards. But even these repetitive activities were, at their core, different every time: as students and teacher reproduced a given activity (say, a “Do Now”) they did so with some differences in the specificities of the writing task, the unfolding participation of students, and the understandings that they established during those activities. Furthermore, since a single piece of writing could serve several different writing “types,” any piece of writing could be pointed in one of several directions. Writing activity, it seems, is inherently “noisy,” with many variables influencing what students do and how they do it.

However, by looking closely at what students do in any given moment and connecting it to other moments with exposures and material connections, we can see that writing activity transforms itself over time, and that the laminated streams of activity are orchestrated differently to accomplish different kinds of writing goals (or even a similar kind of writing goal in a different way). The messiness of writing does not prevent changes in

writing activity from being traceable over time. This particular research site is extremely valuable for indicating shifts in activity, since many students in this site verbalized their writing activity through interaction with one another and their teacher.

The writing activity changes that were detected across the school year were both conscious and unconscious—as Giddens (1984) would say, they were elements of *discursive consciousness* and *practical consciousness*. Some of the writing activity that changed in students could be easily identified via interview. Holly was able to note her concern for sentence structures, for example, as were Zack and Don.

Other kinds of writing activity changes, however, were less obvious and not part of the discursive awareness of the students in the class. The advantage that some students took of multi-draft writing, for example, was not noted during interviews and was not explicitly stated as “drafting” in many cases. Often, Emily asked students to check their work for errors as they translated them to the blog sites, but did not directly encourage students to think about rewriting or reorganizing their work at a higher level. This is not to say that such transformations did not happen, but rather that, if they did, they were changes established in the interactional order of the translation process, and were not brought to the level of discursive awareness.

This study was also able to show that many elements of practical consciousness about writing activity served as the groundwork upon which later conceptual understandings built. As students and teachers interact, they construct activity, roles for themselves, and intentions about what they are doing. They decide, by bumping into and incorporating the reality of others, what they are doing now and what they should do next. Within this interactional organization, students perform various writing activities. This interactional order within

which writing occurs leads students, as they continue to make sense of their interactional order, to reach conclusions about writing—what it is, what it can do, and how it should be done—that will, in turn, influence their future writing at the discursive level. In short, how students engage in writing through their interactional organization of activity influences their eventual conceptual understandings of writing, which will in turn feed back into interactional organizations of writing.

The answer to this question informs the literature and studies on writing development in several ways. Most importantly, it highlights how writers develop in moments of writing activity over time. This provides a nuanced level of detail that assists understandings of writing as “dispersed,” as Prior (1998) puts it, and as orchestrated across various social understandings and practices, as Bazerman (2013) has argued. The results of the analysis above showcase those facts at a granular level: the dispersed actions can be frozen in single pieces of space and time and anchored together into more complex chains of activity, across which we can see enduring shifts in the organization of writing activity.

Furthermore, the findings on writing activity development expand on the understanding of writing development as a series of sublimated tasks organized together in increasing complexity. While this is certainly one facet of writing development, writing activity development actually appears much more complexly. The changed understandings and interpretations that emerge (or fail to emerge) from or for the organizations of writing tasks can follow many different material connections and have a meaningful impact on writing activity development even if the subordination of multiple tasks does not occur, or occurs in the future as a result of the writing activity shift.

Finally, this research shows writing activity development as deeply contextual and, if not free of the natural development of cognitive activity, at least operating flexibly within the wide bounds of that natural development as the circumstances within which writing activity development occurs dictates. The intense back-and-forth among cognitive development, social activity, and perceptions of that social activity are deeply intertwined, and that intertwining must be considered and accounted for in future studies of writing activity development.

The driving question of this study was “how does the writing activity of students develop throughout the course of the school year?” This study identifies changes in growth on two levels: the practical plane and the discursive plane. As students and teachers talk text into being through their discussions about what a writing assignment is and what counts as completing it, they organize their writing activities in different ways. Some of these changes, as we could see with the various units analyzed, sustain themselves over time through the objects in exposures or the material connections leading from one literate act to another, and serve as the bedrock upon which discursive awareness of writing develops.

### **Research Question 2: Writing Activity and Social interaction**

The second question expanded the study of writing activity to involve social interaction: what is the connection between writing activity development and the complex social networks that exist within and without the classroom? This study found that writing activity development was inextricably caught up within the social world of the classroom. Students do not engage socially in one moment and write in social isolation the next: the very acts of writing that the students perform are often not only social in nature but socially laminated, or engaged in social activity on multiple levels. A student may be writing to the



teacher while interacting with a student and attempting to ignore a second student. This complexity is an important part of the development of writing activity.

**Table 6.2: Findings Applied to Answer RQ2**

Emily and her students drew from the structure of the school day to shape their understandings of classroom activity and drive forward subsequent writing activity
Emily created writing assignments that served various purposes: organization, preparation, performance, participation, expansion, reframing, and writing.
The taking up of talk, tools, texts, and others for students' own purposes was regulated by what was in their proximity.
There must also be opportunities for talk, tools, and texts from the situation to be taken up again.
Writing activity shifts are not always apparent on the page.
Students are more likely to develop rich, sustained writing understandings and activities if their interactions with those around them mesh with the writing that they are doing.

This study essentially indicated that there are two different kinds of socialization going on in the act of writing: the socialization that students have as they put words down on paper or screen, and the socialization that results from the written product (including future discussions over drafts). Writing is an attempt to communicate to others across space and time, but writing is also an activity that occurs at specific places and times. If we are to discuss how social interaction impacts writing, then, we have to be aware of both of these forms of socialization.

This study primarily focused on the socialization of students *as they went about the act of writing*. However, it would be wrong to say that a focus on that socialization excludes the socialization that occurs when students' texts are received by another party. In fact, the act of future socializations impacts what students do as they go about the act of writing in numerous ways. As can be seen, for example, through Holly's embracing of the community value of sentence variety, the perceived reactions of an audience impact how a student takes up the interactional order of a given writing situation. The future audience is not absent from the interactions that occur around the act of writing: rather, they are called upon specifically

as students use their understanding of the situation to make sense of things and determine what actions to perform next.

The future audience is often invoked during the interactions that lead up to and/or constitute literate acts. Emily frequently called students' attention to those who would be reading their work, and she did it with various different writing activities, from benchmarks to river teeth to the blog unit. While the attention to audience came through most powerfully during the blogging unit – particularly when Emily discussed parents reading the blogs – references to audience occur throughout many of the units studied. In that sense, then, students' sense of audience is constructed through interactions with others during discussion about the writing activity as well as the writing activity itself.

This study found that there was more at work than simply various audiences when students went about writing: frequently, as students wrote, they organized their social interactions to accomplish that writing. Furthermore, they often drew from earlier social interactions (such as Emily's introduction to an activity, or her description of what students should be doing) to direct their writing efforts. Neither of these claims are particularly revealing: after all, to argue that students follow directions when they go about writing is to argue a very straightforward understanding about how classrooms work. However, the students in Emily's classroom did more than simply listen: they constructed, with their teacher and their fellow students, expectations of what they needed to do, as well as guidelines of how they should go about doing it. They identified terminology, the organization of writing activity, and what counts as successful writing in very general and relative terms before writing and as they complete the act of writing.

For this study, then, social interaction was more than simply a guide to writing: it was a constitutive element in writing, and it directed how students understood their writing activity and what kinds of writing they performed. Through social interaction, students and teachers create space for writing, and they do so amidst a classroom full of different social activity. Within the messiness of social activity, the meaningfulness of writing is established, the goals of writing are established, and the work that students have to do to complete the writing begins.

Many previous studies of the writing development of students have taken the audiences of the writer into account—in fact, the idea that writing should be directed at more than simply the teacher, and that students should have multiple opportunities to publish to wider audiences, is a key value in the National Writing Project’s approach to teaching writing. This study has shown that the idea of who the audience is in a given piece of writing emerges from the interaction about the writing piece and its ultimate goal, even if the audience (particularly when it is the instructor) is tacitly referenced. However, the final audience is only as important as the context around the piece of writing seems to make it. Therefore, the concept of audience is directly connected with the interactions around the act of writing. This is particularly important for younger, developing writers, as their grasp on audience and attention to audience is often caught up within the complexities of many other elements of the activity of writing, as Dyson (2013) points out.

In the introduction to this study, I asked “What is the connection between writing activity development and the complex social networks that exist within and without the classroom?” To present the answer to this question briefly, writing activity is constituted by the complex social networks within and without the classroom. As students interact with one

another and their teacher, they develop understandings of their writing situation that they use as a resource to complete their writing tasks. These interactions also, at least partly, help students understand their audiences and account for those audiences when they go about writing. Furthermore, when the interactions with social networks align with the goals of writing, the changes in writing that occur are more likely to stick around and become a part of the development of writing abilities for that student.

### **Research Question 3: Writing Activity and Student-Teacher Interaction**

This research question explored the role of student-teacher interactions in writing activity development: what is the role of student-teacher interaction in the development of writing activity in students? This research question, as mentioned in chapter one, shifted the focus of the study at times toward the avenues of interaction that students and teachers had to interact with one another, as well as the ways in which those avenues were either taken up or ignored. The findings of this study suggest that student-teacher interactions are important elements in the social actions of students as addressed in the second research question: the interactions between student and teacher enable the students to interact with one another in different and complex ways.

**Table 6.3: Findings Applied to Answer RQ3**

Emily and her students drew from the structure of the school day to shape their understandings of classroom activity and drive forward subsequent writing activity
Emily created writing assignments that served various purposes: organization, preparation, performance, participation, expansion, reframing, and writing.
The taking up of talk, tools, texts, and others for students' own purposes was regulated by what was in their proximity.
There must also be opportunities for talk, tools, and texts from the situation to be taken up again.
Writing activity shifts are not always apparent on the page.
Students are more likely to develop rich, sustained writing understandings and activities if their interactions with those around them mesh with the writing that they are doing.

Student-teacher interactions proved complex in this study, since the teacher shapes student activities in many ways that are not verbalized. For example, when the students walk into the classroom on the first day of school, they will find the classroom organized in a certain way. This organizational pattern will influence where students sit, who they can talk to, and how their organization of activity will unfold. Such “silent” interactions between student and teacher are, by and large, not the focus of this research question. However, other, relatively less-silent activities of the teacher (such as how Emily orchestrated drafts across different periods of time and media) emerge from an analysis of how students and teachers are interacting. That is, when the “silent” interactions become a major component of “spoken” interactions, they need to be activated—that is, utilized by actors as a resource in a given situation—in order to make sense of the situation.

With this nuance out of the way, we can now turn our attention to the power of student-teacher interactions on the development of student writing. Emily discussed writing with her students across very specific and somewhat limited forms of communication. Emily could comment on student work with written marginal comments, with end comments, and through audio comments individually. She also had the opportunity to discuss writing one-on-one with some students as the year progressed. In terms of individual interaction, however, Emily’s opportunities to work with students were rather limited.

But this is not to say that Emily was unable to influence her students in their writing, or that she was only able to do so through her direct writing instruction. Indeed, the classroom is a relatively small space, and Emily was able to easily move back and forth between small-group and individual discussions and large group discussions. As a result, student-teacher interaction could take place in a number of forms within the classroom. Also,

because of electronic communication and Emily's desire to respond regularly to student writing, students were able to communicate with Emily in several ways outside of the classroom.

Even brief interactions between Emily and a student could have a lasting impact on the student. Emily regularly met with students individually and in small groups during lunch throughout the school year. These events were not often with the same students (although there were a few repeated appearances by a few, select students for lunch detention). The interactions, though, could often prove to have long-lasting effects. A few, brief discussions with Rachel at the start of the school year seemed to be a powerful incentive for Rachel to share a great deal of her writing with Emily throughout the year, both in her Writer's notebook and outside of it.

Emily's one-on-one interactions with students were often brief, as Emily was overloaded with students and short on time. However, despite the lack of one-on-one work, Emily was still able to interact with students and impact their writing in meaningful ways throughout the year. Her ability to organize writing purposes is a strong example of her communicative power. If we consider her writing guidelines, feedback, and organization of activity as "interaction," then Emily also had a powerful pull, through her interactions, on the writing activity development of students. Even students who did not seem particularly close with Emily were able to develop an interactive relationship with her, though it may have been at a distance. Alice, for example, regularly engaged with Emily, though it was often via the written word. She asked few questions, required little assistance, and yet was still able to grow as a writer because Emily structured her class in ways that valued the kinds of writing Alice completed.

Based on the structure of Emily's class and its comparisons with other studies of classroom interaction (i.e., Dyson, 2013), the argument can be made that the frequency and duration of interactions between individual students and the teacher, as well as the individual-to-group interactions among students and the teacher, are typical in U.S. classrooms at the middle school level. In this classroom (and in others like it), student-teacher interactions, as complex, multimodal, and multi-person as they are, are key to understanding how writing activity develops in students. This has less to do with the individual teacher than it does with the historical level of power that classroom teachers have during the school day. They have access to the organizational tools that shape what activities students engage in. Even an off-task student, by and large, can be off-task only with the activities that the teacher makes available in the classroom (excepting what the individual student brings to class, of course). To summarize, a teacher's presence in the writing activity of a student makes itself known through a variety of avenues, and this omnipresence of the teacher raises the power of student-teacher interactions' influence on writing. To see student-teacher interactions as carrying on both in groups and through classroom materials gives wide-ranging power to the teacher, even if that power must be mediated by the activity of the student. Student-teacher interactions, then, are heavily structured by teacher activity (even if only tacitly), and studies of the impact of student-teacher interactions on writing activity development should consider that power imbalance.

The beginning of this study asked what the role of student-teacher interaction is in the writing activity development of students. If we consider "student-teacher interaction" as something beyond face-to-face talk, then student-teacher interaction is a primary element in the development of student writing. In that case, Emily interacts with her students through

class discussions, through lecture, through written notes, through email, through internet postings, through grades, and through comments. This constant back-and-forth helps students establish, refine, and engage with different understandings of writing that they can later internalize in different ways. The role of student-teacher interaction in writing activity development, then, is to develop, with students, understandings about writing and the goals of particular classroom writing activity that will help students re-orchestrate their activities in order to complete them more effectively.

#### **Research Question 4: Social and Historical Connections in Writing Activity**

The fourth research question addressed the social and historical aspects of writing activity: what are the social and historical connections influencing this writing activity development? This study, taking into account the layered history of schooling established by Tyack and Cuban (1989), explored how that history (1) presented itself in the classroom on a daily basis and (2) developed over a period of time. By seeing the impact of history both at a given moment and over time, this study was able to show how various social and historical forces impacted the work of individuals in moments of literate activity and the ebb and flow of the schooling structure that those individuals experienced.

**Table 6.4: Findings Applied to Answer RQ4**

Emily and her students drew from the structure of the school day to shape their understandings of classroom activity and drive forward subsequent writing activity
Emily created writing assignments that served various purposes: organization, preparation, performance, participation, expansion, reframing, and writing.
Changes in writing activity are linked with changing pressures in sponsors of literacy.

The findings of this study support the concept of history in schooling as being layered, with multiple levels of school history weaving together to create a complex, difficult to navigate, but overall stable structure of schooling. The different historical layers presented themselves through different kinds of talk, tools, and text throughout the course of the school



year. Of course, some talk, tools, and texts represent more than one historical layer, thus increasing the complexity of unwrapping the complex history of schooling in a specific incident.

Emily and her students were able to use the historically layered talk, tools, and texts in her classroom in various ways to construct meaning in and around the act of writing. This meaning contributed—both consciously and unconsciously—to students’ understandings of writing as the year progressed. Thus, we can say that the writing that students perform is situated in and constituted of the historically-layered structure of the school. Furthermore, as students engage with that historically-layered structure, they move it forward in time, if only slightly. Their interactions are not limited to Emily’s classroom or to merely their seventh-grade education. Rather, what they experience in Emily’s classroom is situated within the span of their educations, as well as within the span of what they understand education to be. As students move through the grades, they achieve a deep, not necessarily verbally acknowledged understanding of how the education system that they are in works, and they begin operating within that system based on that knowledge. In Emily’s classroom, we saw students making sense of that system and, within that sense-making activity, learning to write.

The writing that students perform occurs within their ever-unfolding understandings about school. Students learn what “counts” in different schooling situations—both with writing and without—and they use those understandings (which are established during myriad interactions in different situations) to determine how to act in a given writing situation.

The social and historical connections identified and detailed throughout this study has indicated that the act of writing development does not occur in isolation, and is not void of

ideological, practical, or theoretical content. The act of learning to write is caught up within a variety of other social and historical tensions: as teachers and students engage in the act of writing, they not only do so under very specific time, space, and resource constraints, but they do so through ideologically freighted sponsors of literacy, sponsors that are not necessarily even geared toward helping students develop as writers. Frequently throughout the school year, Emily geared various literacy sponsors not focused on the writing development of students—such as novels, articles, and short essays—and used them as resources that helped students move forward as writers in different ways. Other resources, in turn, acted as tools for improving student writing even without Emily’s explicit organization.

In terms of understanding how the schooling structure and its history impacts the everyday writing activity of students and the planning of writing instruction for teachers, it can be argued that the historically layered pressures of schooling make themselves materially visible through the talk, tools, and texts within the classroom, and even—to a certain extent—the people (i.e., socioeconomic status, race, gender, etc.). In order to understand the writing activity that is happening in a given classroom and how it develops, it is first important to understand how and why the classroom and the people in it came to be in the first place. Understanding how these pressures build over time does not necessarily inform how people in present-day activities interpret the pressures that they encounter, but it helps researchers understand the reach that these pressures have, as well as how they can be shaped toward the ends of others during future literate activity within school systems. It also provides interesting hints toward understanding the potentials of given reforms.

To sum up the findings from this research question briefly: Emily’s classroom was heavily caught up within an historically layered school system, and the actions of those in the

classroom served to reproduce that historical layering to a great degree, even as they developed as writers. Furthermore, Emily's classroom was constructed through social interaction, as was the writing development of the students in the class. The writing that occurred in class was highly interactional in nature, with students making sense of writing activity through dialogue with one another and their teacher, as well as paying attention to dialogue between their teacher and other students. These experiences also layered atop one another, so that all of the classroom participants were able to reach stable, aligned understandings of various writing activities. Students grew as writers based on those understandings. So, in a sense, the historical layering of schooling served as a set of resources for students to better understand their situations, and the social aspects of schooling served as the groundwork through which students developed as writers both consciously and unconsciously.

### **Contributions to Writing Development**

A review of the literature in chapter one indicated that research on how students develop as writers has widened from the space on the page to the activity around the writing over time; has indicated that students definitely do show changes in their processes and products of writing across their schooling experiences; and has identified instructional decisions as a powerful shaping force in the process of writing development. Building from these findings and using an interactionally situated and systemically reinforced and reinforcing system of human activity as a theoretical framework for the further exploration of writing activity development in students, this study found that writing activity changes through reorganizations of writing activity brought about through interaction with surrounding talk, tools, and texts in ways that endure through the material connections

among moments of literate acts in accordance with sociohistorical forces of politically, economically, and socially powerful distant locations. These findings expand considerably on current understandings of writing development.

Of primary importance for our understanding of writing activity development is the power of situated moments of writing activity in shaping writing development for students. Several earlier theorists (i.e., Swales, 1997; Prior, 1998; Dyson, 2013) indicate that writing development is a highly situated activity, and the findings of the literate acts examined here underscore the situatedness of that activity, and show how writing development occurs in specific times and places, even if the final product of those changes appears dispersed (i.e., Prior, 1998) across space and time. Literate acts, both empirically and theoretically, can serve as a mechanism through which to view changes in writing activity, and material connections can serve as a window into the endurance of such changes.

A second key finding about writing development is that the progression of writing development cannot be discerned solely from one perspective. The writing activity development that the students in Emily's class showed was uneven and multidirectional: students did not simply progress across an established program of writing provided by the teacher, but engaged in constant negotiation and tactical uses of available materials to further their own ends in addition to the teacher's ends. How writing development appears in retrospect and how it occurs on a moment-to-moment basis are starkly different.

A third key finding to this study for understanding writing development is that key changes can occur in the writing activity of students without leading to large changes on the page. As Emily's students talk their texts into being differently across the school year, the final product did not always vary as widely as the talk. However, these shifted approaches to

talking about writing and going about writing could, later, serve as a springboard for further development. When considering the writing progress of students, it is important to examine not just the final products that are being produced, but the processes through which those products are assembled, because the process of writing may yield further clues of development than the final product. A student may be perched on the edge of a new understanding of writing without showing it in his or her final written product. Furthermore, significant changes in writing can be seen without understandings of writing varying considerably. A teacher's highly structured approach to instruction can easily create a significantly different final document for students without changing the activity in any enduring way.

A fourth and final finding as it applies to current understandings of writing development is that the students make sense of their writing opportunities through the structure of their school day. Even while engaged in the task of writing, students are constantly attempting to answer the questions of "what is happening?" and "what do I do next?" In their interactive constructions of situations to answer these questions, students engage in writing. Furthermore, while answering these questions and making sense of their writing activity, students draw from the world around them, including the structure of the school day. Students use their understanding of the structure of the school day, the typical lesson, and the classroom's cues to shift from one activity to another to structure, organize, and understand their writing. This is not a simple adornment to the process of writing but an integral part of it, and future research into writing development should take into account how students are using the social structures of their worlds to engage in writing activity.

## **Chapter Seven: Concerns – Theoretical, Methodological, Practical**

*“Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passions, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence.”*

-John Adams

The purpose of the first six chapters of this text are twofold: first, to establish a theoretical and empirical approach to studying writing activity that would allow the findings of this study to connect with prior writing research; second, to establish a set of stubborn facts, based on available evidence and method, to extend the understanding of writing activity established in that prior writing research. Chapters five and six in particular have provided evidence of specific facts germane to the development of writing activity in students at the junior high level. In this chapter, I use these findings to construct a writing activity theory of the middle range that extends current theoretical perspectives and justifies the research approach provided in chapters three and four. I also use this theory to link my findings to practical applications for teaching writing, teacher education, and writing activity. I conclude this work with an eye toward future research and possible theoretical expansion.

The middle range theory that I draw out from these findings is called Enduring, Situated Orchestration Shifts (ESOS), and informs current understandings of writing activity development while also contributing considerations about the teaching of writing, teacher education, and the act of writing in general. Each of these items provides rich opportunity for the practical application of studying the world of writing through the lens of ESOS.

### **Building a Middle Range Writing Activity Theory**

The term “theory of the middle range” was used by Robert Merton in his review and critique of the state of sociological study. Merton was concerned that sociology—a

discipline still in its infancy compared to the hard sciences—was rushing too hard to catch up with other fields. He critiqued “grand theories” as being applicable both everywhere and nowhere because of the lack of specifics and gaps in their explanatory power. Likewise, he critiqued theories of the narrow range for their lack of applicability outside of the specific circumstances of their study. Merton was looking for theories of the middle range, or theories that provide specific information for wider circumstances than the area of study but avoid becoming so generalized as to lack utility in any given specific application of that theory.

This “middle range” concept has been explored in the field of writing studies by Bazerman (2008). In his reflection on historical studies of writing, Bazerman (2008) argues that “middle range theory seems appropriate to pursue in writing studies, given the complexity of writing—linguistically, psychologically, technologically, socially, historically, and even economically and anthropologically” (p. 4). A theory of the middle range—or an approach to studying writing that is tightly anchored to the available data and yet still connected to many more sites of writing than are shown in this dissertation—is a useful and practical tool for both understanding and studying writing activity.

At first, it would seem that a theory of the middle range as defined by Bazerman and Merton would clash with grounded theory, which is an approach to studying human activity that Merton may well have considered a theory of the narrow range, since its coding process is so tightly knit to the situation from which the coding arises. However, grounded theory’s ties to the factual evidence present in a given analysis does not preclude it from being used as a basis for building a theory of the middle range. In fact, grounded theory’s ability to stick close to data while still providing an additional level of abstraction was one of the reasons

that this project was able to construct a theory of the middle range. Grounded theory, rather than being anathema to middle range theories, actually serves as a stepping stone between the facts on the ground and the larger, more abstract understandings that can be so helpful in other research and applications of the results of this research. If a theory, as Hillocks (1995) argues, is the best explanation for a set of data, then a theory of the middle range that emerges from grounded theory is the best explanation of a set of that with powerful implications for similar data sets because of the social, historical, cultural, and economic factors that bring the data about.

The theoretical understanding drawn from this study extends, of course, from the understandings about writing derived from the empirical framework described in chapter two. In that chapter, an approach to studying writing that both accounted for activity systems and explored, within those systems, the everyday re-media-tive actions of individuals was established. This drove the construction of the methodological choices that followed and, as such, influenced the findings provided. The theory that I present in this section, then, has its roots in the complex alliances of activity theory and ethnomethodology (among several other theoretical perspectives) and can be considered an extension of those theoretical precepts.

The middle range theory that I present here is limited, of course, by the subjects that were studied that led to its construction. Since the subjects of this study are middle school students who were engaged in writing for school, these findings are applicable most specifically to secondary students engaged in school writing in U.S. settings. This is not to say that literate acts are not useful in other contexts, or that the general approach of multiple exposures is not potentially useful elsewhere. Rather, it suggests that the findings here have utility in other secondary, U.S. writing settings, and—while these findings may resonate or



even correlate with the findings of other writers in other settings—there is currently not enough information to go beyond those limits. The theory examined here, then, is focused on the writing of secondary students in the U.S. for school purposes.

Within this rather wide but still focused frame, I suggest the application of enduring, situated orchestration shifts (ESOS) as a new theoretical perspective through which to view the writing activity development of students over time. This terminology (as well as some of its subsequent definitions) draws heavily from the work of Bazerman (2013), Prior (1998), Bakhtin (1986), and Volosinov (1929). An unpacking of this term is necessary before moving on to the ties that this theoretical perspective has to the existing framework.

Enduring, situated orchestration shifts describe the way in which writing activity develops over time. The primary characteristic of ESOS is endurance: the shifts observed in the literate act chains identified must endure. That is, they must represent more than an adjustment to immediate circumstances. They must indicate changes in the perception of writing activity, which brings with it an alteration of the actual activity of writing due to different writing purposes. If the change in writing activity does not endure, it does not fall within the scope of ESOS.

ESOS endures in different situations over time: the consideration of activity here is “situated,” limited in time and space to the span of directed activity according to the actors in a given interaction. Furthermore, situations themselves occur in specific places: they are brought about within localities even if they are connected to multiple localities through deeply grooved connections.

The “what” that endures is a shift in the orchestration of writing activity. Drawing from Prior’s (1998) notion of streams of activity, this theory positions writers as orchestrators

of streams of activity. As people engage in writing activity, they orchestrate the talk, tools, and texts around them—which are the local actors of those streams of activity—to accomplish goals. The orchestration with and around writing activity is an ongoing phenomena: as students complete one literate act in one situation, they find themselves propelled toward another by that very completion and with a set of talk, tools, and texts to carry that sense-making further in a new situation as it is constructed.

As students encounter different kinds of writing situations throughout the school year, their orchestrations of streams of activity begin to shift through changes in interaction and the use of available text and tools. Tasks are habituated, concepts are internalized, the internalization-externalization process becomes smoother, and cognitive processing alters to adjust for all of these improvements. These shifts are the writer coming to think about the act of writing differently. The situation of writing, to the writer, ceases to look the same when shifts in writing activity happen. Researchers can identify these changes by following the material connections among literate acts.

ESOS, then, serves as a concept that directs the research and theoretical eye toward the kinds of writing activity that shows changes in cognitive activity and physical activity. ESOS both directs attention and explains how writing activity alters over time. Writers orchestrate their activity again and again over time, and as they continually orchestrate their writing activity, they subtly or drastically change that activity at different points in time. Considering writing activity through ESOS shows that, in the classroom at least, changes in writing activity are the norm rather than the exception: students are regularly shifting their writing activity toward something for a great many different lengths of time.

This description of writing activity builds from several larger theories of writing and human activity, as mentioned in the theoretical framework. In order to embrace the concept of ESOS, several facets of larger, more sweeping theories must be taken into consideration. First, Prior's (1998) concept of streams of activity is the basis of the orchestrations that are at the heart of the theory. However, while the concept of multiple streams of activity was developed by Prior (1998), the work of finding multiple streams of activity in any given situation was borne out by the methodology of this research project.

Second, the ideas of consciousness promoted by Schutz, Garfinkel, Mehan, and Wood structure the data that contributed to the construction of ESOS. ESOS considers experience to be "situational," or unfolding in a series of moments that actors work to construct together in order to make sense of their worlds. As people orchestrate streams of activities, they do so in a series of interlocked situations.

The situational orchestrations discussed in the above two points occur in spans of space and time. Situational orchestrations occur somewhere at some place. Toward this end, this theory builds from sociocultural theory in order to more carefully attend to the way that time and space is not only considered, but constructed by the actors in a given interaction under study.

### **ESOS at Work in Emily's Classroom**

The data provided in chapter five identifies a plethora of literate acts, and it is in the presentation of those acts that the variety in literate act orchestration is seen. A student who completed the "Do Now" in a certain way on Monday may end up completing it (or not completing it at all) in a completely different way on Tuesday. The trick of ESOS is being able to identify the connections across literate acts and ferret out the meaningful shifts in

activity. This, in general, is accomplished through a historical view: what do people keep doing, again and again, when the situation remains the same? However, since the situation is often not “the same” in similar situations, teasing out the changes that matter can be particularly troublesome.

A revelatory finding from the above data was the way in which a shift in the orchestration of activity in a literate act can be carried forward through a variety of material connections, leading to shifts in the orchestration of activity in the future that may look incredibly different from the initial shift that was identified. For example, Holly’s increasing comfort during the “Do Now” on November 13 was signaled by her willingness to construct a sentence on the fly in response to Emily’s questions. However, the shift in activity that was seen in later literate acts was not an increased willingness to construct varied sentences on the fly (although Holly also did that on occasion). Holly’s growth as a student became evident in a different kind of writing: the construction of blogs during Emily’s blog writing unit. Holly took the material connection (material as in it was established during discussion in class) of the community value of sentence variety, and carried it with her from the “Do Now” to her blog writing. She used the understanding of the community value of sentence variety to cast her back onto her earlier-established, situational knowledge of how to create varied sentence structures, and brought that knowledge forward into her blog writing while she was translating her paper-and-pencil rough draft onto her blog site.

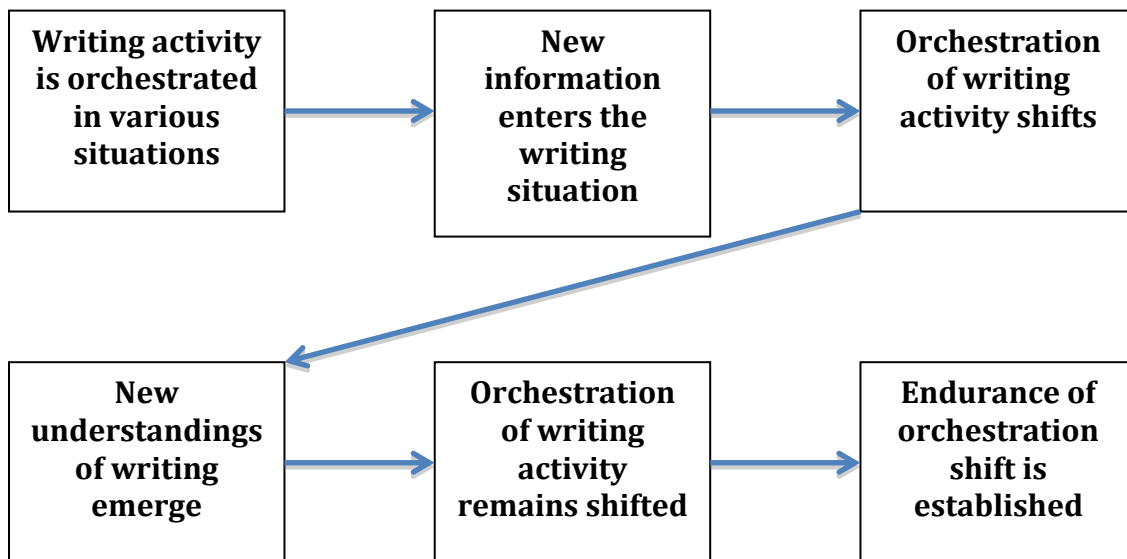
This example, which echoes with many of the other examples provided above, indicates that the ways in which literate acts may be connected, and changes in them sustained, may not be in the straightforward manner that one may believe. Instead, literate acts can influence other literate acts in a variety of ways, and it is in the tracing of material

connections and the talk, tools, and texts of different exposures that those connections can be traced.

### **Representing ESOS and Moving the Discussion Forward**

The theoretical tool of ESOS allows for a careful examination of the individual, moment-to-moment classroom activity of students. Furthermore, it puts these examinations into some sort of dialogue with a larger theoretical framework. By considering the momentary acts of literate knowledge with the fuller view of social, literate activity in mind, this study is able to make more effective, longer-term use of the knowledge gleaned from moment-to-moment writing.

**Figure 7.1: The Progression of ESOS**



The figure above presents, in an encapsulated format, how writing activity shifts over time. Writing activity generally shifts and endures in five steps. First, a writing activity that is, generally, organized in the same way over time (excepting the normal noise of reproduction) is interrupted with the arrival of “new information.” This new information can appear in various forms: a student can reach a new understanding, be presented with new

writing tools, be given a new writing task, or act a writing task into being differently. In response to this new information, the writer shifts his or her activity. With this shift in writing activity, the writer achieves a new understanding of writing. This understanding does not have to be discursive in nature—the development could be of an unconscious sort, a change in the orchestration of activities that the writer does not necessarily take a keen awareness of. However, since the new approach to writing, with the new (and possibly unconscious) understanding of writing is successful, the orchestrations remain shifted across multiple literate acts that may or not be chronologically connected. As a result, the shift in orchestration gains endurance, becoming a part of the repertoire of the developing writer.

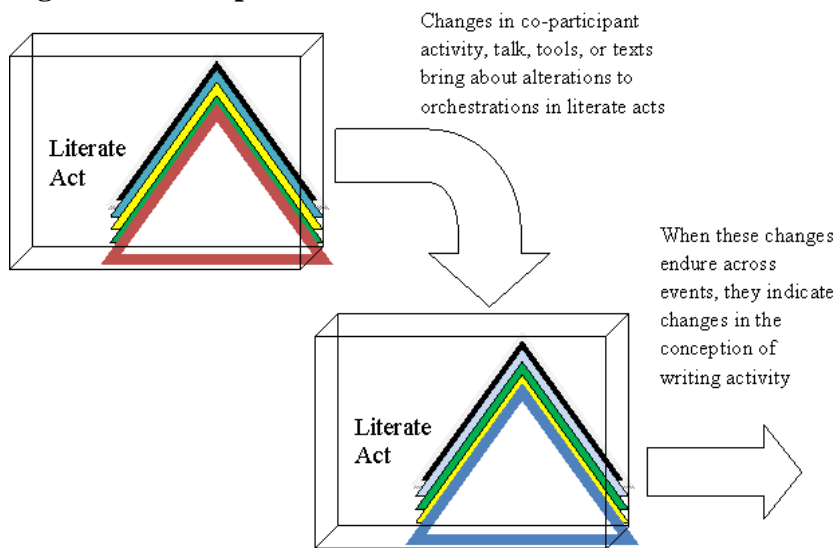
By orienting ESOS toward the writing of students in secondary schooling, this project has been able to construct a theory of the middle range for the development of writing activity. ESOS provides an important, historically-informed, and theoretically connected fact of the experience of learning to write at the secondary level in U.S. schools. The methodology of grounded theory, literate acts, multiple exposures, and material connections brought about a clear enough understanding of the work done by the ten selected students in Emily's classroom to construct the concept of enduring, situated orchestration shifts.

The theory of ESOS has a far-reaching impact on the ways in which the literate activity of secondary students can be examined, refined, and taught. It also carries with it the considerable theoretical issues discussed earlier in this chapter. Considering the writing activity of students through this lens can provide writing teachers, teacher educators, and writers with new, insightful understandings about the complexity of writing at the level of the literate act. These impacts are discussed in further detail below, but those conclusions spring from the established theory of ESOS.

Thinking of student writing development as enduring, situated orchestration shifts may be easier to understand with the help of an organized set of diagrams. Figure 7.1 presents a shift in the orchestration of activities during a literate act. The box represents a simplified form of the literate act as shown in the previous chapter. Stripping away the material connections and details of the exposures makes the shifts in orchestrations easier to see.

The colored triangles within the box (and, importantly, reaching out of the box) is a simplified version of an activity system along the lines of Leont'ev. The actor-tool-object organization remains the same, although these activities are orchestrated with and against each other in the given literate act in order to establish an effective outcome (shown by the arrow to the right of the box-and-triangle).

**Figure 7.2: A Representation of an Orchestration Shift**



Note that the second literate act moment (i.e., the triangle-and-box setup) is below the first literate act, signaling—as it did in the above descriptions—a shift in the orchestration of activities. A closer look at the activity triangles reveals a change in the order of colors, further detailing the changes in such an orchestration. However, Figure 7.1 does not have the

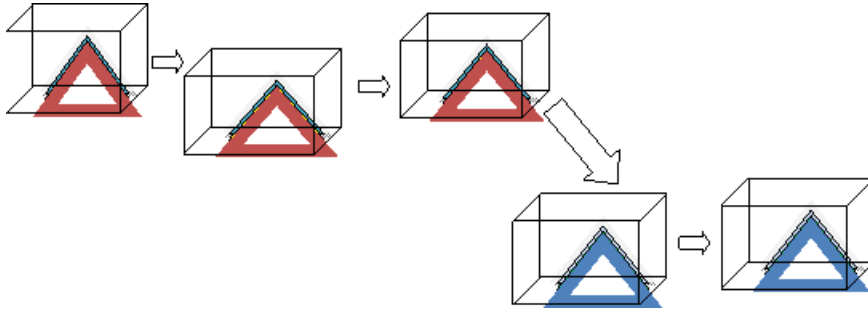
expansive power to indicate lasting change: the shift from one literate act to another may not be an enduring one in any meaningful way. A view that expanded more widely across time, such as Figure 7.2, would provide a clearer indication of whether the shift in orchestrations had any endurance.

The figure above clearly shows a shift in the orchestration of activity from one literate act to the next. Figure 7.3, however, indicates what an enduring shift in activity, theoretically, may look like. Consider the first three literate act moments presented. Each of these literate acts is slightly different from the others—as noted before, the literate act orchestrations are not exactly the same in every instance, since different people from different realities talk an interactional order into being differently. However, the orchestration of activity triangles are largely the same, and the bumping around of literate acts may be seen as “noise”—shifts that may become important, but, for the purposes of those three literate acts, are not important.

However, when the fourth literate act occurs, there has been a substantial change in the order of the activity triangles (blue is now the opening color, rather than red) and the boxes have dropped significantly, signaling a change in the organization of activities. What differentiates this figure from Figure 7.1 is the second literate act moment, which indicates that the shift in activity is meaningful because it endures: the actors involved in this literate act are taking up their literate activity differently, and it remains different. Whether this is a conscious or unconscious understanding, of course, cannot be shown in a diagram with his low level of detail.

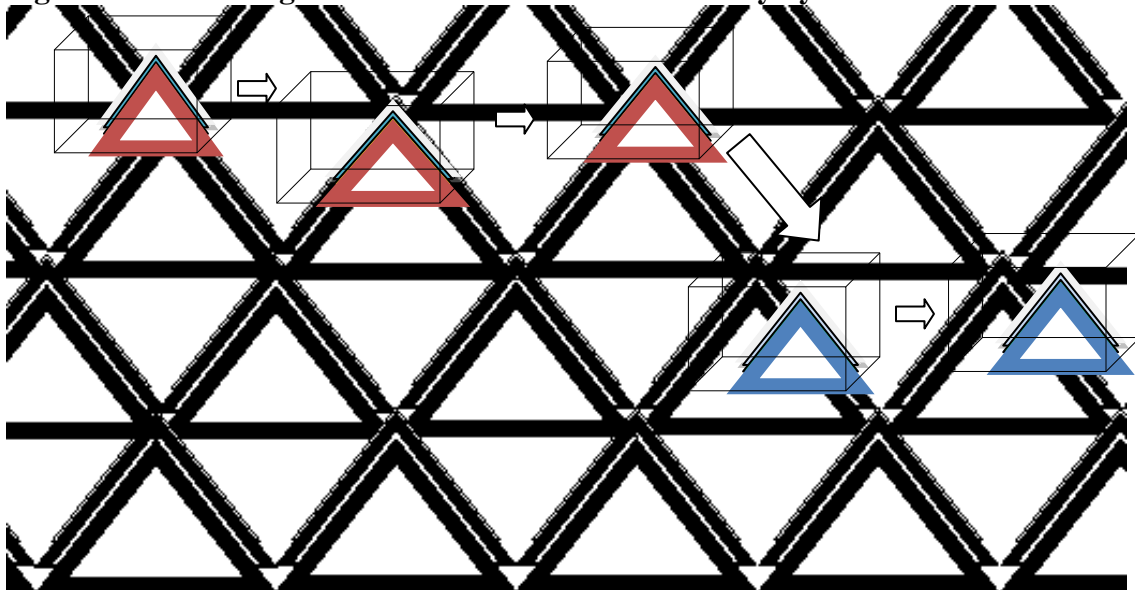


**Figure 7.3: An Enduring Orchestration Shift**



The shifts in activity that Figures 7.2 and 7.3 offer are, of course, not situated in any particular activity system. But an activity system can be considered a series of interlocking activity triangles created as different people attempt to accomplish different goals in ways that influence one another—such as when a teacher creates a blogging assignment that the student has to complete (or, to flip it around, when the student completes the assignment and the teacher has to grade it). These shifts in writing activity, then, need to be set within systems of activity. Figure 7.4 presents this kind of activity system background.

**Figure 7.4: Enduring Orchestration Shifts in an Activity System**



As can be clearly seen in Figure 7.4, the construction of literate acts does not occur in a vacuum but is rather connected to a series of other interlocking systems of laminated

activity. Each triangle in the background is not actually a single triangle, but is a series of overlapping triangles linked together as people, objects, and mediatory devices work together to form various kinds of outcomes—outcomes that end up as part of another activity triangle. As students perform literate acts differently, and as those differences endure, the system of activity that is the classroom, the school, and the educational system of the state and nation persist, even if the way that the student engages with all of those structures has shifted, even if only slightly.

As students engage in shifts in their writing activity, then, they continue to act in ways that support the complex, historically situated, laminated systems of activity of which they are part. While their changes lead them to participate in those activity systems differently, the larger activity systems themselves remain unchanged. However, at a more local level, the interaction of students and teacher around writing in the room may change significantly, leading students to new, mutually constructed orchestrations or even conscious understandings about writing. In this way, the enduring orchestration shifts of students from one situation to another can impact classroom activity while still supporting the status quo of the larger social structure.

This larger view of ESOS, and how it fits in with larger understandings of the social structure of society, will make clear the importance of the propositions that make up ESOS. ESOS draws from activity theory as well as the tenets of ethnomethodology, and tries to bring together how the methods of members' sense making in the classroom leads them to construct mutually aligned understandings as a basis for activity that, at the same time, upheld the larger, enduring systems of activity that constitute a school system. By examining the literate activity that took place in Emily's classroom through grounded theory and a

careful organization of the artifacts that emerged from that examination, this study has been able to constitute the middle range theory of ESOS, which is in turn connected to the larger theoretical framework of activity- and ethnomethodologically-grounded views of how people make sense of the world.

### **The Propositions of ESOS**

The above discussion has identified specific facts of change in the literate activity of students in Emily's classroom throughout the year, which serve as the grounding for the middle range theory of enduring, situated orchestration shifts. But in order to make this approach more effective in future applications, allow me to present a brief overview of the major propositions that hold up this middle range theory while also keeping it connected to the facts established on the ground.

First, it is important to situate these findings. What I define as ESOS is easily identifiable in the classroom writing activity of middle school students. It is unclear how easily ESOS will be identified and explored with older populations. Writing is an activity conducted in at least partial solitude, and in that solitariness people draw from the conceptions and typifications of their audiences and writing situations. As writing becomes more and more internal, and more and more distanced from interactions with others, ESOS may become more difficult to detect. All of this, of course, is research that remains to be examined. ESOS, therefore, should be considered a way of examining school-age children as they engage in school-based writing tasks. Perhaps this theory can extend to understanding and exploring non-school based writing tasks, but further research will have to determine this.

With this situatedness in mind, then, we can turn to the propositions that construct the theory of ESOS. The first proposition that this theory relies upon is that of *social interaction*.

That is, writing is not only a form of social interaction, but the act of writing itself occurs amidst social interaction. When people write, they write *to* an audience while also surrounded by resources—talk, tools, and text—that they can draw from in order to go about the act of writing. The “situations” of ESOS are constructed by the actors in those situations, and the facts and understandings that emerge from those situations are the result of active construction by those actors.

In addition to social interaction, ESOS depends on the proposition that *writing situations are interconnected with other writing situations*. That is, writing that occurs in one time and place is connected, somehow and in some way, with writing that occurs in other places. Writing does not remain isolated in a given time and place but extends forward in time and space in order to serve as a resource for future writing activity to someone in some way.

ESOS rests upon the propositions of social interaction and the interconnectedness of writing situations, but it also takes into account the *internalizing power of concepts*. As people engage in social situations, they begin organizing their understandings in more abstract manners, according to interconnected concepts. These conceptual understandings, at first, emerge from the situations constructed among situational actors, but eventually become more abstracted, more capable of being displaced and used to direct activity in other situations—in other words, more internalized. The importance of ESOS rests upon the understanding that concepts spring from the construction of situations. As people organize their writing activity differently, they lay the groundwork for reaching new understandings of what is going on around them.

The concepts that people internalize are, in turn, used to make sense of future situations. Of course, a given concept must be activated in the mind of an actor in a situation in order for it to shape the situation, but the power of concepts to shape the construction of situations is strong nevertheless. This understanding leads to the proposition of *interactional resources*. To understand ESOS in a way that can forward the work of teaching writing and learning to write, it must be understood that an orchestration can “endure” in many ways—as Holly showed with her “Do Now,” the writing activity of a single situation can impact future writing activities through a variety of material connections and the talk, tools, and texts of various exposures. Shifts across material connections and exposures are not just possible, but are regular features of writing development.

The final proposition upon which ESOS builds connects it firmly to writing development. This is the proposition of *projected social presence*, and it brings the interactional nature of much of the analysis above to the activity of writing. Writing, for these middle school students (and particularly while they are being studied) happens among others. However, writing as a final product is meant for an audience that is distant in both time and space—the writer does not expect the reader to read what he or she writes until the reader gets the piece of writing, after all, and the reader is obviously not in front of the writer, thus necessitating the writing. The writer, instead, calls to mind this future and distantiated reader to construct an appropriate piece of writing for that future, distantiated situation. It is in this way that conceptual understandings and typifications are brought into play more powerfully than they often are during interaction. Without the back-and-forth of interaction to drive meaning forward, meaning must be more carefully constructed so that the slow, distant back-and-forth that writing creates can be successfully conveyed.

The propositions of social interaction, the interconnectedness of writing situations, internalization, interactional resources, and projected social presence ground ESOS theoretically and empirically. The findings indicated in chapter five and presented specifically above connect these propositions to what occurred in Emily's classroom at different points during her school year. Furthermore, the theoretical connections established in the theoretical framework of chapter two as well as the theoretical overview provided at the start of this chapter link these propositions clearly to other, established theoretical understandings of interaction, writing, and classroom activity.

These five propositions can help future researchers apply ESOS in meaningful ways. By accounting for social interaction, the interconnectedness of writing situations, internalization, interactional resources, and projected social presence through careful accounting practices such as the kind established in chapters three and four, future researchers can examine the writing practices of others for enduring, situated orchestration shifts. Such searches can yield useful explanations of how and why various writing lessons fail to work, or detail the hangups of struggling students.

### **The Methodological Power of Literate Acts**

Literate acts and the study of them has created the set of orchestrated facts that supported the middle range theory established in the prior section. However, literate acts have a great deal of flexibility and power as an independent methodological tool. Literate acts provides researchers with a way of looking at the writing activity of students and teachers that provides both an up-close view of writing activity and the connections of that activity to more distant literacy sponsors and systemic freedoms or constraints.

Literate acts allow researchers to explore how the enduring, situated orchestration shifts of individual students occur on a moment-to-moment basis. While literate acts are too rich and too difficult to tease out to be easily applicable at the classroom level, they are certainly still useful at the research level, and allow researchers to more carefully understand how students go about changing their writing activity throughout the year both on a momentary basis and in a more enduring form.

The concept of literate acts as a methodological tool is also a very flexible one: while the specific exposures selected may change, the overall concept of using exposures and focusing on specific moments of writing activity over time are ways into further exploring how people grow and change as writers throughout their lives.

Since literate acts are situated in both existing theoretical understandings of how people make sense of the encounters with the world that they endure and the physical, social, and psychological objects that they enact during those encounters, literate acts as specifically defined and applied in this study have a rather narrow band of possibilities for future use, while the concept in general can expand outward to other kinds of analyses that involve the unfolding nature of human consciousness and understanding. Literate acts, in other words, allow researchers to focus on specific moments of writing activity in ways that also indicate the threads connecting those specific moments to other specific moments in different temporal and spatial locations. Examining a literate act, therefore, does not necessitate a focus on the micro-level events of an activity: these small actions can be connected outward into the historically enduring social institutions and our understandings about those institutions.

As indicated above, literate acts carry with them considerable methodological power and analytical purchase. While the specific exposures used for this study may not be applicable on a much wider scale—in keeping with the middle range theoretical target this project set out for—the general idea of using multiple exposures to bound and connect the literate acts of people in different situations has a great deal of utility across a wide variety of situations. The specific exposures used in this study, while not applicable on a widely generalized scale, can still be useful for many kinds of classroom study.

### **Practical Applications of the Findings**

Interesting as the theoretical findings of this study are, they cannot overshadow the enormous practical applications for teachers of writing, teacher educators, and writers that this study identifies. Looking at writing through the theoretical lens of ESOS allows researchers to identify multiple concepts that teachers could use to implement in their classrooms fairly soon and on a regular basis.

The findings established within this study are something of a double-edged sword. First, they provide indications that may lead to a different way of thinking about writing, the teaching of writing, and the development of writing activity over time. Second, they provide ways to make rather straightforward changes to the teaching of writing in schools and in schools of education. This last, much more practical concern should not deny or diminish the power of these findings to reshape how we think about writing instruction and writing activity development—rather, they should be seen as a way of beginning to account for these facts within given social structures and institutional demands.

**Practical applications for teaching writing.** Writing instruction is, to put it mildly, a complicated matter. Teachers of writing engage their students with the act of writing in



many different ways at many different times. Furthermore, the idea of a “teacher of writing” is itself very flexible, as Brandt (2015) points out. While there are, certainly, roles for specific writing teachers, particularly in postsecondary education and through writing coaches in K-12 schools, students learn to write through many different teachers in many different disciplines. While this study has examined the teaching of writing in a subject area—language arts—that has traditionally focused on writing instruction, that is not to say that there are not implications in these findings for those who teach writing in other subject areas, or even multiple subject areas.

Many of the practical applications for teaching writing that emerged from this research are aligned with the National Writing Project’s beliefs and principles about what writing is and how it should be taught. Perhaps this is the result of Emily’s own connection with the National Writing Project—her work in the local NWP site in multiple times and places has impacted her work in the classroom, which has no doubt impacted the development of this study. That aside, however, this project indicates that the writing processes of students are, indeed, as Graves (1981) claims, highly individuated. This is not to say, however, that individual writing processes are (1) not articulable or (2) impossible for teachers to corral. Rather, the writing processes of students is one of many interlocking facets in the lives and personalities of students, and while these processes need to be respected by teachers, they can also be teased out, discussed, examined, and even altered through classroom activity, student-teacher interaction, and student collaboration.

Writing instruction can be and has been delivered in multiple ways according to multiple principles, but this study suggests ways of helping teachers deliver writing instruction that align with some heretofore tacit principles of writing and writing instruction.

It would be impossible for teachers to monitor every literate act of students as they develop throughout the course of the school year. However, it would also be unfair to judge the development of student writing in terms of a final, written product. While changes to final products may indicate some growth, they may also mask the small, interactional shifts in writing activity that will, in the future, generate new conceptual understandings about writing that can, in turn, generate better-developed final written products.

In order to more deeply understand how students develop as writers, teachers can take steps to monitor how the activity of writing students is developing—roughly. Frequent discussions with students about writing can indicate what conceptual understandings of writing are emerging in the discursive consciousness of individuals. Additionally, the strategic collection of writing artifacts—in terms of video, audio, and written documentation—can indicate how students are shifting their interactional orders. Of course, classroom teachers (and particularly K-12 classroom teachers) do not have time to engage in the deep analysis of literate acts that this study performs. However, teachers could still view footage from class as well as written documents to determine what students index in their talk, how they index it, and how it reflexively indicates their understandings of writing and the writing world.

As teachers orchestrate their writing activity, they can do so with attention to multimodal approaches to writing across various spans of time. Building on Prior's (1998) understanding of writing as mediated and dispersed, teachers can work to make writing *more* dispersed in the classroom, giving students opportunities to return to tasks again and again, so that they can interact more with and around a given writing opportunity and, by extension, have the chance to develop a more complex understanding of it. Teachers should also work

to align their discussions about a writing activity with the goals of writing, and to provide clear material links among various literate acts to further encourage development.

Of course, increased interactions with writing do not necessarily encourage students to think differently about writing. For example, assigning one essay after another—or one revision of an essay after another—would not necessarily bring about any meaningful changes in activity (except, perhaps, increased penmanship skills). Rather, teachers must engineer these increased interactions with writing in order to bring forward different kinds of interactions that provide students with avenues to new understandings of writing. This call, then, is for a carefully orchestrated approach to increased interactions with writing.

The natural individuality of writing activity development is, according to the implications of this research, something to be embraced rather than something to be feared. Writing instruction cannot, according to both prior studies and this current study, guide a student's every writing move, and this lack of control opens up a world of possibilities that writing instructors can use in their favor. Embracing the individuality of the writing process opens up possibilities for discussion about writing activities, the consideration of multiple kinds of writing activities, and the possibilities of altering heavily the writing activities that occur in the classroom.

A final consideration for the teaching of writing, both K-12 and in higher education, involves issues of transfer. Recent work on transfer in writing by Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak (2014) have addressed ways that students reassemble and remix their concepts and understandings to support writing in new situations (such as college, new classes, etc.). Studying the enduring, situated orchestration shifts and how they change in people as they go about remixing and re-assembling their writing could provide deeper understandings about

transfer, how it works, and how people take up the environments around them to engage in that transfer work. ESOS, as well as the literate act analysis proposed here, can flesh out the typology that these authors have begun.

The findings of this study suggest a radical alteration of the ways in which students go about writing and are taught writing in schools. However, short of these radical changes, teachers can use these available findings to inform what they do in the classroom in useful ways. These adjustments should not be seen as casting aside the more radical implications of this study, but rather an acknowledgement that these changes are, indeed, radical enough to be beyond the scope of any teacher's power in a school. Those radical changes aside, however, the above suggestions for the teaching of writing are both supported by the study and applicable to a great many classrooms given current constraints and possibilities on the teaching of writing in U.S. public schools.

**Practical applications for teacher education.** The implications for the teaching of writing above naturally extend to the preparation of writing teachers in teacher education programs. However, there are, in addition to those above, additional implications for teacher education in the findings of this study. These findings present writing in a refined light, meaning that they do not show a heretofore unknown view of writing, but rather shape more clearly some theoretical aspects of writing development and the associated applications for writing instruction that could inform the way that teacher educators go about preparing their teacher candidates to think about writing instruction. While the implications of these findings for teacher education are far ranging, this section limits itself to several considerations: how teacher candidates could think about writing and writing activity; how

teacher candidates can be prepared to deliver writing instruction; and how teacher candidates can take advantage of the natural individuality of writing activity development.

One of the most important implications of this study for teacher education is the impact it has on how teacher candidates can be taught to think about writing and writing instruction. If writing instruction is not a deliverable set of directions for going about writing but an ongoing orchestration of shifts in the way writers organize their activities and their interactions, then the concept of delivering straightforward rules about writing—while still sometimes appropriate, no doubt—is more limiting than previously believed. The results of this study suggest that students can improve in their writing and their understanding of writing when given frequent opportunities to construct interactions around writing, as well as frequent opportunities to re-mediate a given writing assignment into different media (i.e., blogs, final drafts, discussion).

Teacher educators, then, could begin considering ways in which the writing activity, rather than the final written product, can be the of the teacher's attention. While this does sound like a call for attention to the writing process, it departs from process writing discussion in several ways. First, discussions of writing process that emerge from Emig (1973), Elbow (1975) and other writing process researchers are not often grounded in either activity theory or ethnomethodology. Because of this, writing process approaches have not traditionally taken a close look at how writing activity is constructed in interactions among students and teachers, as well as within student-teacher interactions. The results of this study indicate that teacher educators can guide the gaze of teachers toward the language that students use while engaging in writing, as well as the specific activity that these students take up.

The true challenge of this research is not pointing the gaze of teachers toward the activity of writing but creating mechanisms for simplifying and organizing that gaze.

Teachers do not have time to closely examine every word spoken by every individual student, and they certainly do not have time to work one-on-one with every student in their classes, so teacher educators can help novice teachers by developing a method by which teachers can easily and accurately examine how students are making sense of writing activity together.

A potential vehicle for helping novice teachers develop such an organized gaze is through the use of classroom video. While these teachers may not benefit as much from a breakdown of student activity into literate acts, novice teachers could view video of students discussing writing and engaging in writing to see what kinds of understandings continually emerged both on paper and via discussion. Regular practice and individual discussion about such activity could help teachers develop an eye for examining student writing activity and interactional order establishment quickly and easily either within their own classrooms or via video-recorded lessons.

This research also impacts teacher educators because it calls to the attention of schools of education the discussion of writing in English language arts classes. While students often write in English language arts classes more than any other class, they often write to discuss their reading. They do not often read about writing, or write in order to discuss the mechanics of their writing. While there are many historically-situated reasons for this, the fact remains that discussions about writing are rare and, since novice teachers have probably rarely experienced them as students, they will feel uncertain about how to organize them and carry them out. Teacher educators can take the lead on this, creating some

straightforward methods for discussing writing that allow novice teachers to become comfortable with the act of discussing writing.

A final suggestion for teacher educators involves multimodal instruction. Novice teachers in teacher education programs are often encouraged to use technology in the classroom, although sometimes the technology they are encouraged to use is unavailable when they arrive at their teaching assignments. Nevertheless, these teachers are encouraged to use technology, and in some cases have entire classes devoted to it. Increasing the technology use in classrooms is, of course, both a good idea and a difficult task to accomplish due to the tendency of classroom teachers to “hug the middle” (Cuban, 2004) on new initiatives and the problematics of school infrastructure (Cuban, 2014), particularly as the economy continues to lag in its recovery.

As teachers battle through their problems and attempt to engage their students with technology, though, it would be good for them to understand the various ways in which multimodal approaches to writing offer reflective opportunities. While it is possible that individual students will take up the initiative to engage in reflection as they move across different modes of writing, this reflective activity can be almost guaranteed through the careful work of the teacher. By introducing teacher candidates to theories of multimodality and, even more, to practical applications of those theories, teacher educators can help their charges learn to consider multimodality as an opportunity for reflection and discussion. The structure that Emily provided to her students through the worksheets, discussion questions, tickets out, and commentary across multiple modes of writing indicates that this is a valuable place to encourage writing development, and incoming teachers should learn early on the many ways to take advantage of it in their own classrooms.

Considering how teacher candidates could think about writing and writing activity, how they could be prepared to deliver writing instruction, and how they could take advantage of the natural individuality of writing activity development through the results of this study indicates several different approaches for revising established approaches to teaching writing in teacher education programs.

**Practical applications for the act of writing.** The practical applications for the act of writing are perhaps the most far-reaching implications of this study. In fact, due to the limits of the subjects under study (i.e., middle school students writing for school purposes), these implications are carried out not through the wide range of research subjects but by the theoretical framework connections through which those students were examined. In this section, I present some interesting findings about the act of writing that appeared through the examination of literate acts, carry the implications of those findings back through the theoretical framework, and from there establish some general principles of writing activity that could serve as useful guidelines for going about refining writing activity.

Beginning with the facts that established the middle range theory above, then, this study has both confirmed the highly individualized nature of writing activity and identified the tools through which similarities of writing activity can be established. This study has also shown that the writing activity of students is able to draw these similarities across different student writing because of the typified actions of individuals in different places across time.

Another interesting fact that has developed among these middle school students regards the ways in which other actors come into play when writing. As established during discussions of audience above, the writers studied during this project dealt with two kinds of



audiences: the distantiated audience of the reader, and the immediate audience of co-present actors who contribute, in some ways, to the construction of the system within which writing occurs. These situated actors not only contribute to the orchestration of the act of writing, but assist in the construction of comments and types that, in turn, contribute to the writer's assumptions of audience.

Obviously, the young writers involved in writing at Goodland Middle School engage a great deal more with interactions around their writing than professional writers do. The research on expert writers that has been conducted in the past (i.e., Prior, 1998; Prior & Shipka, 2003) indicate that professional writers engage in Environment Selection and Structuring Practices (ESSPs) (Prior & Shipka, 2003) in which other actors are often absent from the scene. However, "often absent" is not nearly the same as "absent," and a more extensive review of the kinds of writing professional writers engage in over time may reveal more about the actors who work with writers to construct situations within which literate acts occur. Moreover, even if that were not the case, the connection between ESSPs and a sense of audience is strong, and future research should examine how ESSP activity influences a sense of audience in the writer.

Writers themselves, of course, need not conduct a study in depth but should consider the ways in which their surroundings are helping or hindering their efforts to reach out to a particular audience. In the case of the middle school students that I studied, the sense of audience (and even the particular audience) was articulated through discussions. For more experienced writers writing in relative isolation, there may be other factors (i.e., written artifacts or shared understandings in the location of writing) that are influencing understandings of audience, and they may be well worth investigating.

In addition to considerations of audience, this study suggests that a good deal of the understandings and organizations of activity about and around writing are largely not articulated for writers. To borrow from Giddens (1984) again, they are not elevated to the level of *discursive consciousness*. While the middle school students in Emily's classroom lacked the power to do much about this, older, more experienced writers may be able to. Regular, careful reflection on one's writing process, or discussions of a writing process with others, could elevate some tacit writing practices to the level of discursive awareness, and subsequent discussions could result in a change in the interactional order of writing that experienced writers accomplish. This suggestion builds from the connections found between interactionally-established understanding and more abstracted, conceptual understandings: these two, it would seem, have a responsivity with one another that is not always taken advantage of throughout classroom writing experiences.

The final implication for writers that this study carries with it is, perhaps, the most straightforward: writers should take careful account of how they form their writing activities, both in the short-term and long-term. This distinction is particularly important because writers often pay greater attention to long-term organization (i.e., making a plan for writing on a daily basis) than short-term organization (i.e., organizing one's environment for writing). Prior and Shipka (2003) indicate ESSPs as a way of thinking about writing environments, something that this study supports. The world within which a writer writes influences in many ways—often unnoticed ways—how that writer perceives, takes up, and completes the writing task. Looking carefully at the short- and long-term effects of a given writing activity would benefit writers' control of their writing immensely.

## **Concluding Thoughts and Future Research**

This research project has confirmed what many researchers and writers have long suspected: that writing is a socially, historically, and psychologically complex mess. This project has also shown, however, that such a mess can be examined with careful attention to detail and consideration of larger social structures. Furthermore, a close examination of writing activity at the local level allows, surprisingly, for an equally close look at historically powerful social structures. Writing, then, is certainly messy, but this messiness is capable of close examination and contains within it patterns, tendencies, and powerful social inertia.

When writing is examined on scale of moments, tendencies of action and interaction become very difficult to predict. There are a great many situational conditions that can often get in the way of identifying the kinds of writing activities that endure across space and time. However, by paying attention to the writing activity of students through the lens of literate acts and multiple exposures, this study has been able to identify enduring, situated orchestration shifts that enable researchers to identify trends of changes in writing activity in students over time. Both the specific results of this study as well as the larger issue of ESOS carry with them considerable implications for further research.

With the issue of ESOS, further research in other kinds of writing conditions and with other kinds of writers needs to explore how ESOS looks in different kinds of situations. The methodology of this study, tailored as it was to the specific situation of classroom teaching, is not able to speak a great deal on a larger scale about how individuals develop as writers throughout their lives, and particularly throughout their lives outside of school. However, the general concept of multiple exposures and the search for literate acts serve as starting points

for undertaking this research. Additionally, the ESOS provide a starting point for examining these various kinds of writing.

Further research can also explore more deeply the connections that specific moments of writing activities have to distantiated social forces. While this study was able to identify a great many sponsors of literacy in the various documents provided, a study solely focused on tracing out historical influences may be able to identify more sponsors, or at least trace the rich history of those sponsors in a given moment of literate action. However, this research does provide a starting point for such a search.

The results of this study also indicate a need for further research into teacher education about writing instruction. While the works of Kennedy (2012), Smagorinsky (2012) and many others have provided rich sites of analysis into teacher education, studies into the historically unfolding influence of sponsorship in teacher candidates, novice teachers, and experienced teachers is lacking. Future research that identifies how the beliefs and attitudes about writing changes over time—especially when linked with the sponsors of literacy that these teachers encounter—can inform the paths of preparation that schools of education design for incoming teachers.

Finally, future research would also do well to find more technologically innovative approaches for gathering and aligning data within classrooms. While this study has been able to identify a great many literate acts in the year of observations that took place, a great deal more potential data fell through the cracks. Future research could align the various methods of data collection (i.e., interview, document collection, video, note-taking) into a cohesive, easy-to-use, and organized research apparatus that would catch—through multiple

data points—more literate acts that could paint a more accurate picture of the paths that enduring, situated orchestration shifts take.

This study took advantage of the natural microscope into writing activity that Emily's classroom created and was able to discover a great deal about the ways in which writing activity in students shifted in enduring ways over time. The theoretical, methodological, and practical implications of this search are expansive, and indicate ways to expand on existing research on the writing activity of students.

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## Appendix A: A Calendar of Observations

### September

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
2	3	4	5	6
9	10 Period 4 Period 5	11 Period 4 Period 5	12 Period 4 Period 5	13 Period 4 Period 5
16 Period 4 Period 5	17 Period 4 Period 5	18 Period 4 Period 5	19	20
23 Period 4 Period 5	24	25	26	27
30 Period 4 Period 5				

### October

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
	1	2 Period 4 Period 5	3	4 Period 4 Period 5
7	8	9	10	11

14 Period 4 Period 5	15	16 Period 4 Period 5	17 Period 4 Period 5	18
21 Period 4 Period 5	22	23	24	25 Period 4 Period 5
28	29	30 Period 4 Period 5	31	

### November

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
				1
4	5 Period 4 Period 5	6	7	8 Period 4 Period 5
11	12	13 Period 4 Period 5	14 Period 4 Period 5	15 Period 4 Period 5
18 Period 4 Period 5	19	20	21	22 Period 4 Period 5

25 Period 4 Period 5	26	27	28	29
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### December

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
2	3	4	5	6 Period 4 Period 5
9 Period 4 Period 5	10 Period 4 Period 5	11 Period 4 Period 5	12 Period 4 Period 5	13
16 Period 4 Period 5	17 Period 4 Period 5	18 Period 4 Period 5	19 Period 4 Period 5	20
23 WINTER BREAK	24 WINTER BREAK	25 WINTER BREAK	26 WINTER BREAK	27 WINTER BREAK
30 WINTER BREAK	31 WINTER BREAK			

### January

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
		1 WINTER BREAK	2 WINTER BREAK	3 WINTER BREAK

6	7 Period 4 Period 5	8 Period 4 Period 5	9 Period 4 Period 5	10
13 Period 4 Period 5	14 Period 4 Period 5	15 Period 4 Period 5	16	17
20	21 Period 4 Period 5	22 Period 4 Period 5	23 Period 4 Period 5	24
27 Period 4 Period 5	28 Period 4 Period 5	29	30 Period 4 Period 5	31

### February

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
3	4	5	6	7
10 Period 4 Period 5	11 Period 4 Period 5	12	13	14
17	18	19	20	21

24 Period 4 Period 5	25 Period 4 Period 5	26 Period 4 Period 5	27 Period 4 Period 5	28
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### March

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
3	4 Period 4 Period 5	5	6 Period 4 Period 5	7
10 Period 4 Period 5	11 Period 4 Period 5	12 Period 4 Period 5	13 Period 4 Period 5	14
17 Period 4 Period 5	18 Period 4 Period 5	19 Teacher Absent	20 Period 4 Period 5	21 Teacher Absent
24 SPRING BREAK	25 SPRING BREAK	26 SPRING BREAK	27 SPRING BREAK	28 SPRING BREAK
31				

### April

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
	1 Period 4 Period 5	2 Period 4 Period 5	3 Period 4 Period 5	4 Period 4 Period 5

7	8 Period 4 Period 5	9	10 Period 4 Period 5	11 Period 4 Period 5
14	15 Period 4 Period 5	16 Period 4 Period 5	17 Period 4 Period 5	18
21	22 Period 4 Period 5	23	24 Period 4 Period 5	25
28	29 Period 4 Period 5	30 Period 4 Period 5		

### May

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
			1 Period 4 Period 5	2
5 Period 5	6 Period 4	7	8 Period 4 Period 5	9 Period 4 Period 5
12	13 Period 4	14 Period 4 Period 5	15 Period 4 Period 5	16 Period 4 Period 5



19 Period 5	20 Period 4 Period 5	21 Period 4 Period 5	22 Period 4 Period 5	23 Period 4 Period 5
26 Period 4	27 Period 4 Period 5	28	29	30

### June

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
2	3 Period 4	4 Period 4 Period 5	5  LAST DAY OF SCHOOL	6
9	10	11	12	13
16	17	18	19	20
23	24	25	26	27
30				